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Australia Day – What Makes a Community

Richard: Hi, I'm Richard Fox and this is Messages of hope. On Australia Day there's lots of focus on celebrating community, but what does it really mean to be in community?

Richard: Australia Day is a great time to reflect on who we are, where we have come from, and what does it mean to live as a community of people from a wide range of backgrounds and interests. What are your Australia Day memories, Celia?

Celia: I vividly remember we'd go holiday down south and there was this big boat race, the Milang-Goolwa was always around the Australia Day weekend. There was one day I remember which was blowing an absolute gale. It was just not a beautiful sailing day. The swirl was about two meters high. We got about halfway across the lake and my dad said to me, "We've gotta change the head sail. The boat can't cope with it," which meant we were heeling right over and-

Richard: You were gonna sink.

Celia: Yeah, well, it was pretty dodgy. Dad's yelling out, "Get that sail down!" I'm thinking, "What about your daughter who's going under the waves and could be washed off any second?" I'm crawling out the front, no life jacket, nothing like that. You don't do these sorts of things back then. I can remember my uncle was there and he's trying with one foot to hold onto the boat and hold onto me and help pull in the sail. It was just one of those chaotic moments, but we did manage and I think that's part of that whole camaraderie, I guess, is that you all know what you're meant to do and you just make it happen.

Richard: This is a real team effort.

Celia: Absolutely. When it works together, it's just beautiful. You feel that sense of accomplishment and you do feel that sense that you as a team have managed to do that and get everything happening.

Richard: My Australia Days aren't that dramatic. I'd grown up just thinking Australia Day was another public holiday and didn't think much of it, but Australia Day started getting a little bit special for me is when I actually moved to a rural town for work and witnessing how they celebrated it and what it meant for the town and how special it was. It actually made a big impression on me and especially amongst all the things that were going on in the community and the adversity they were facing. It was quite amazing.

Celia: Coming up, we'll hear more about celebrating community, especially in the face of adversity.

All around Australia, a lot of communities have special events to celebrate Australia Day. Richard, you experienced that when you moved up to the Riverland.

Richard: Yes, it was a quite special event and considering this community, this Riverland town, was going through so much at that stage-

Celia: Okay.

Richard: -there was a severe drought, there was lots of water restrictions, the government was actually paying farmers to remove their crops. There were livelihoods being lost from generations of farming.

Celia: This is heartbreaking.

Richard: It was. There was a real sense of hopelessness almost in the community, and yet to see them on Australia Day all come together, quite a diverse range of peoples of all different backgrounds from India and all over the world, Europe, there for fruit-picking-

Celia: I was going to say, that'd be quite a few different cultures up there.

Richard: Yeah, all the farmers, all the townspeople, everyone come together and just celebrate what they had, which was each other and even if it wasn't very many oranges or all sorts of produce, they brought what they could. It was an amazing celebration. It was their whole town celebrating this Australia Day and what their community meant for each other.

Celia: Is this all centrally located, like at a sportsground or something?

Richard: It was, yes. They put this whole big event on. It was a big stage, so there were local performers and local acts. There were local food stalls so you could go and eat all sorts of foods and there was show rides and then there were activities that all the kids and families could be involved in. It was just a great distraction, in a way. It was a great celebration of just, "Actually, what do we have" and be thankful for that.

Celia: That sounds so good. But now more so thinking about people who may not feel comfortable about interacting at a community level like that because they may be afraid of being hurt or they're afraid they're going to be rejected-

Richard: Yeah, I've been hurt in the past, had bad experiences.

Celia: And that can be really hard. I guess that's about being sensitive people. You might think, "Well, they're very standoffish" or "They're not being involved." But it might be that there's just that fear or hurt and that's where you can reach out a hand or just gently and sensitively try and connect with them.

Richard: Yeah, through your words and actions of love and kindness.

Celia: That's where people see God, is through what we do and who we are.

Richard: And care for them, and even if you have been hurt and are hurting or had bad experiences, you can trust in God for His help and He is there with you, that you can have the courage to go and say hi to someone.

Celia: Yeah, and you can give people that sense of community. It doesn't have to be on a big grand scale like the Big Oval Event. It can be just that sense of community and connecting with your neighbor or somebody you see at work every day.

Richard: Well, they say three's a crowd. You don't need that many people to actually have a community.

Celia: You're listening to Messages of Hope with Celia and Richard. We've been talking about community and we're all human. We all have vulnerabilities and things that we're good at. Community embraces those strengths and also those differences. Community's not just about celebrating together, it's also celebrating our differences and the diversity. You probably would have experienced that up as you were talking about at your community event in the Oval.

Richard: That's right, yeah. They have people from all over parts of the world and they're all different races and nationalities, people from all sorts of walks of life. It just flavored the whole event to see that. It's impossible to have a community of one. If they were all like me or all like you or all like one person, there's no sense of community.

Celia: Also, the fact that to make one of those events occur, you're going to have different people with different skills and different organizing skills and people who can put food together, people who can get acts on the stage, all of those sorts of things.

Richard: Ah, that's right. It takes a lot and a lot of different people with a lot of different skills, and that's what I think helps a community and builds a community, is actually celebrating that diversity. God has made us all different and unique and special, not to be in a community of one, but to be in community with each other.

Celia: It says in the Bible we are all parts of the one body. The hand doesn't do what the eye does. There's all these different parts but they all work together.

Richard: If we're all hands, we wouldn't be able to see anything.

Celia: Exactly. There you go. But it's not about one person being better than another or status or anything like that. It's about that relationship and working together, I guess, isn't it?

Richard: And learning from each other. Listening to each other, helping each other, caring for each other, sharing God's love. God loves us. He wants to be in community with us, in relationship with us, and so He can guide us and lead us into community and relationships with each other and to share His love, His forgiveness, His hope.

Celia: Exactly.

Richard: His gifts with others. He blesses us so much.

Celia: Sometimes that can be really quite threatening for people to go out and do that and to share, but He gives us that strength that we can step out and connect with other people. It doesn't need to be huge showy ways, it can be just little small ways like just say hello to the neighbor or you chat across the fence, just start small sometimes. But God gives us the ability to be able to connect with people and we have to trust that, don't we?

Richard: He does, yes. He looks out for us and cares for us. In Him, we have a community. We don't have to be afraid to go out and have community with others. By forming those communities, there's so much blessing. That event at Waikerie, if we had to do that with one person, it would never have been anywhere as big as anything like that. But together, everyone together, with all their experience and expertise and their gifts and pull it all together like that was just an amazing celebration of community.

Celia: That made you feel part, like you said, you'd just arrived there and this was one of the first events that you were involved in. That made you feel part of the community, didn't it?

Richard: It did.

Celia: Made you belong.

Richard: We can have that with each other. We don't even need Australia Day to have community.

Celia: I know, I was going to say it's really just an excuse, isn't it, to perhaps make that a time when you connect with people.

Richard: Yeah, we can have community anytime, out at the front garden, at work, anywhere. It simply is taking that time to be with people, building community. There's a real sense of joy in that. I think we can do so much more and I think God does so much more for us and through us and with us when we're in community.

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