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## EASTER – A TIME OF HOPE

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**I have experienced the destruction from bushfires first hand, and listened to many stories of people going through all sorts of terrible things, such as drought, floods and the global pandemic. I'm Richard Fox from messages of hope. So what does Easter offer us in times of crisis?**

I remember as a child waking up early to discover Easter Eggs in the baskets we had prepared for the Easter Bunny. It was one of the few mornings we would wake up that early. We'd spend hours the day before making the baskets and we'd leave a carrot and some water for the bunny.

Seeing the shiny covered chocolate was amazing and we couldn't wait to unwrap one, smell the chocolate and crush it open to eat for an early breakfast.

They were great memories which I now share with my children. Chocolate Easter eggs now come in different shapes and sizes. And with different fillings. It's a wonderful time of chocolate and pretty wrappers. And there's also the toasted hot cross buns.

But Easter isn't just about unwrapping and eating chocolate eggs.

What's Easter like for you?

Maybe it's a time to catch your breath, have a break, catch up with family and friends?

Or maybe it's a time when life is not going so well. There have been bushfires, droughts, floods, and disease.

So how can a time like Easter help us through it all?

Easter is a time when we can catch our breath. Whether we've been fighting fires, recovering from floods, or simply trying to keep up with the business of life, Easter gives us a chance to rest and reconnect with our families - and ourselves.

I remember attending an Easter church service a few years ago. It was on the river bank, at dawn, before the sun came up. Great potential for a beautiful sunrise reflecting off the still water in the lagoons. But there had been severe drought and water restrictions that year. The lagoons on the side of the river were bone dry. It was so dry, there were large cracks in the clay where you could lose your shoe if you weren't careful! The community was worn down from 7 long years of drought, and sadness and depression hung over the crowd. People doubted that it would ever rain enough to break the drought.

That's when, in the stillness, someone in the crowd broke the mood with the flippant comment, "Don't worry, this'll all be full of water next year!" We all laughed. It was so far-fetched that it had to be a joke! People had been hoping for drought breaking rain, every year, for seven years! With the disappointment of that, all we could do was laugh. Anything else was too painful.

But as the year went on, rain started to fall. It was going to take quite a bit of rain to fill the river, let alone spill into the lagoon and then fill it.

The rain was welcome relief and gave the whole community a lift.

So much so that a year later we stood in that same spot and amazingly, the lagoon was full of water! It was incredible to see. We couldn't stop smiling. We shared about what it

looked like a year earlier and how tough it had been. We couldn't believe that it looked like this now. That cheeky throw away comment last year came true.

The Easter dawn service was celebrated extra loud that year. From what looked like a hopeless situation, God kept us hope-full, and the rains finally came.

But like the hope of water in times of drought. The hope of life from what seems dead. Hope can rise up from hopelessness.

On the first Easter, the situation looked hopeless. Things looked very bleak and people were crying out for someone to save them. They had been ruled by a foreign government and it didn't look like ending anytime soon. The situation looked impossible. Maybe like living through many years of severe drought and the desperate need for rain. Maybe there's something happening in your life where you feel trapped and need rescuing from?

On that first Easter, a man came claiming to save them. That man was Jesus. He drew people together to follow him and he was carried into their city like a king. The people had dreams about what their new life might look like. Freedom from slavery. Freedom to live as their own people again. Freedom to build a life again.

Yet now this man was being crucified on a cross. He had stirred up the authorities and they had conspired to have him put to death. He was betrayed by friends and accused of trumped up charges. In a matter of days, he went from freely walking through the streets to being nailed to a cross. A horrible form of torture and excruciating way to die.

All hope looked lost. Life seemed impossible once again.

Yet, on that cross, something amazing was happening.

On that first Easter hope was truly being born.

As Jesus was dying on the cross, the situation looked hopeless, but what was really going on was freedom. Freedom, not as the people expected and not as we might expect, but better. Jesus death on the cross gives us hope that not even death can defeat us. And death didn't defeat Jesus either. 3 days later he rose to life and many people saw him, including his friends, enemies and more than 500 people on one occasion. What looked like the hopelessness of a man dying on a cross turned into the hopefulness of freedom from death. And not just the death that we will all face in the future, but the death of things that enslave us even now.

On that cross Jesus gave up his life to take all of the things that enslave us onto himself and destroy them. Things like guilt, shame, and fear that trap us and can seem impossible to break free from. Jesus sacrificed himself so that we could be free. Even today We can still give Jesus our guilt, shame and fear and he takes away their power over us, through the cross. In return, we have freedom. Freedom for new life, a new and fresh start. It doesn't matter how many times we fall back under the power of guilt and fear, Jesus keeps on bringing freedom.

This is where, every year, the chocolate Easter eggs and hot cross buns remind us about the wonderful freedom Jesus won for us.

An egg can look lifeless, like a stone, yet from an egg comes life. A hot cross bun symbolizes the stone that held Jesus in the tomb but was rolled back as Jesus came to life. That life was for me and you. A wonderful and free life that we can remember when eating our Easter eggs and hotcross buns.

I love Easter. Not just that I like chocolate and toasted hot cross buns. Not that I just need a break from a busy start of the year. Not just because it takes my mind away from the things that are going wrong with the world. But because it gives me hope. Hope that because Jesus died and rose over 2,000 years ago, I also have hope of a new life, a new start, and freedom to live in the life he won for me. I hope you can experience this too.

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