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STORY OF CAROLS

Discussion with Richard and Celia

Celia: Hi, this is Messages of Hope with Richard and Celia. Today we're looking at some of our favourite Christmas carols and what they mean to us. What memories do you have of your favourite carols?

Richard: Well merry Christmas, Celia.

Celia: Thanks. I can't believe it's Christmas again already.

Richard: Ah, it's a great time of year, isn't it?

Celia: It is. There's something about it I think that's a bit exciting. What do you love about Christmas?

Richard: I love the Christmas lights.

Celia: Okay.

Richard: I grew up in a town, Lobethal, and the tradition was to put Christmas lights up and seeing all the town lit up under Christmas lights was just an amazing experience.

Celia: It's a beautiful thing. The fairy lights and there's just something magical about it, isn't there?

Richard: There is.

Celia: Absolutely. I like putting up Christmas lights all over our house. And you know, the whole neighbourhood gets into it and it brings everybody out of their houses and it's just that real, I don't know, it's a real community sort of feeling about it.

Richard: It's like this light out of the darkness. There's a joy in lights. I think another thing that actually gives and is one of my favourite memories of Christmas is singing the Christmas carols. They're just amazing and one of my favourites that I remember even as a kid and then singing with my kids is Away in a Manger.

Celia: What is it about that one that's so special to you?

Richard: I think it's the simplicity of the actual carol. There's lots of carols, but this one actually, to me, is really simple and it cuts through the busyness of Christmas. So all the trappings and the bells and whistles of Christmas and the busyness and the gifts and the catching up with family, and all sorts of messiness and stress that goes on, but here, Away in a Manger, this little baby Jesus came.

Celia: It just tells the story of what it's really all about.

Richard: Yeah. The heart and the core in a very simple way to a simple tune. And just gives me the peace and the joy of Christmas again.

Celia: Yeah, you're right. It's all about the baby, the birth of the baby and that's what's important, isn't it? But Richard, why do we actually sing Christmas carols? Where did that come from?

Richard: It came from a tradition of wanting to share the Christmas story and then in a community way. So to be able to share that Christmas story, the story of Jesus coming into the world as one of us, in song and to very common, popular tunes.

Celia: So what song does that for you?

Richard: Well one that stands out for me is Once in Royal David's City. It's got a great tune, but also just the words in it. Once in Royal David's City, stood a lowly cattle shed where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed. It really grounds you in the story of Christmas and all the verses of that wonderful carol just highlight the story of Christmas in a grander way. It's not a fairy tale. It doesn't even hold it up in any grandeur. It just tells it for what it is.

Celia: So what's so special about this baby that came?

Richard: Well, for Jesus to be born back in those times in a stable amongst animals late at night in a feeding trough, really in the back blocks of Bethlehem. To depict that and to show that I think gives me hope in my life when things aren't going all that well or going a bit crazy in life. It grounds that well actually Jesus was born into something quite similar and so I can hold onto that hope that, well if it's good enough for God, it's good enough for me. It's not spiritual, but it's grounded.

Celia: It's that humanity too of Jesus, isn't it? The fact that he came, he knows what we go through. Yet he came to save us. You know, that ultimate sacrifice of dying for us to restore our relationship with God.

Richard: Celia, what's your favourite Christmas carol?

Celia: I'd have to say Silent Night. It's always been beautiful, you know that slow music and slow song and it's just got beautiful words, but what really makes it special for me is the fact that I started singing it to my kids when we sang going to bed at night. I always used to sing to them and then come Christmas time, I would sing Silent Night and some of the other really lovely Christmas carols, but that was one that just stuck with us. We kept singing it even when Christmas was past! It was something that they always wanted. Sing Silent Night because it calmed them. It was one of those things that it was just a beautiful song and they could listen to the words and they just ... it soothed them. So we sang it all year round. And now when I hear it, it takes me right back to my kids, putting them to bed, that peace I guess that comes with that.

Richard: So sounds like you sing it in a really nice way too to your children.

Celia: Oh I don't know. The children are very good. They don't judge you. They don't say, "Mum, don't sing anymore." Because you're mum and it doesn't matter how you sing. And God doesn't care how you sing! I guess it's that whole routine and just that whole thing of being with your kids, that bond. It doesn't matter what your voice is like.

Richard: Are there words in there that really speak to you?

- Celia:** I think that holy infant so tender and mild and sleep in heavenly peace. That was my wish for my kids. Sleep in heavenly peace! Radiant beams from thy holy face. It was beautiful imagery for me and just taking it back to the fact that Jesus is core.
- Richard:** I can see what you mean about the imagery of Silent Night. And you used to sing this all throughout the year, did you?
- Celia:** Yep. All through the year because it became their request. I had to sing Silent Night before we left. There was a number of songs, but Silent Night became one of those ones that was all year round and that's a kind of a good thing really, isn't it?
- Richard:** Oh Christmas is ... it can be all year round. It's one that can keep us grounded back to the heart, of who we are as people.
- Celia:** It's that gift of Jesus.
- Richard:** Yeah. And who God is for us. That he is with us and at Christmas where he came as one of us, we can hear that again. Ground us again, refocus back to what's important and sing those to our kids in our family times.
- Celia:** I don't sing to them anymore, they're too old for me to sing them to sleep these days. Unfortunately I go to bed before them! But it's just every time I hear it now, it brings it together for me.
- Richard:** Yeah. We can sing Christmas carols any time of the year. I suppose it means a lot at Christmas time to sing Away in a Manger, Once in Royal David's City, Silent Night, whatever your favourite Christmas carol is, but to hear again through carols, the story of Christmas, the peace and the joy that that gives so that when we see the Christmas lights or enjoy the Christmas pudding or whatever it is about Christmas that gives us hope and joy, we can focus on, well it's actually the relationship with Jesus as that baby who came into the world as one of us, for us, to give us peace and hope.

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