

## Easter: Reflection and Hope

### **Round table discussion with Valdis Andersons, Jo Chamberlain and Tania Nelson**

**Valdis:** Easter is very real. It was a very real historical event, and it's really important to us because it gives us life, it gives us hope.

**Jo:** When do we actually sit, reflect, think about life decisions, about sacrifices people have made for us, things that are most important and meaningful to us?

**Tania:** Hi, I'm Tania Nelson, and you're listening to *Messages of hope*. I'm here with Valdis and Jo, and we're going to talk about Easter.

I love the Easter long weekend. Typically, my family, we go across to Moonta Bay for the weekend. We do lots of beach walks, jigsaw puzzles, and then of course on Easter Sunday we have an Easter egg hunt with the grandchildren. It's a really fun time.

**Valdis:** It's a time of being together as a family, no matter how big that family is, and doing something. For some people, it's going away interstate, within the state, or just simply having the time off at home.

**Jo:** My children are a little bit older now, but two of my four children do still love Easter. We look forward to that moment of being able to go on the Easter egg hunt and we make our little baskets and get quite excited about where the Easter Bunny's hidden the eggs. this year.

**Tania:** So, Valdis, we know that, according to the Bible and other historical sources that Jesus lived, he was then brought before the authorities and he was condemned to death. So, what happens next?

**Valdis:** What happens next is really quite horrific when we start delving into what goes on at that time. Jesus is beaten, he's flogged, he's treated very roughly by the soldiers. And then he is forced to carry this big piece of timber, which we call a cross, for quite some distance to a place where other prisoners are crucified. Jesus is hung on a cross. He's hung there on that cross for quite some time, and then dies. He's taken off the cross, and this one man who owns a very large tomb arranges for the body to be placed there. And a big stone is rolled against that tomb. It makes it very difficult for humans to roll the stone away. This group of women turn up very early on the Sunday morning, and they find the stone is no longer there and the person they're looking for, Jesus who was crucified, He is not here. He is risen.

**Jo:** I think the challenge is that the whole Easter story is not the kind of story you can promote really easily. We know that that's actually how people were killed, back in those days. They were put on a cross, they were put to death in a most gruesome and horrific way, but to actually be able to tell people that, that's not the end of the story. That's not the end of what we celebrate at Easter. Yes, Jesus died, but the symbolism and the understanding of somebody who died on a cross and went through a gruesome death, like, nobody chooses to do that, do they?

And so to actually think that there might be a guy out there, who lived, who took on all of our suffering. For God to love the world that he gave his only son, as a gift, as a sacrifice for all. That in itself is enough for me to hold onto this hope that, God loves us so much, that he wanted somebody else to take away the pain, the suffering, and the sin.

**Valdis:** And the consequences of sin are now, of course, death. We know that, and we have eternal life because we believe that Jesus *did* rise from the dead. Romans chapter 10 verse 9 tells

us that "if you declare yourself that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved and therefore also have and enjoy eternal life."

That's a wonderful promise about Easter. It's incredibly beautiful and really mind boggling that this is what the Son of God has done for us.

Easter is somehow not as big a deal food wise as Christmas is. I know it's very important as well, and people go out and buy seafood and prawns and all that sort of stuff. And I love that myself. It's wonderful. But then we don't seem to have the great big emphasis that we put on food like we do at Christmas. We have the Christmas Eve dinner, Christmas day lunch. Later on, at Christmas Day, dinner again, and it just seems to go on and on, whereas at Easter time, it's just really the one day.

**Jo:** You're talking about food not being all very important at Easter, but we talk about that Lenten season beforehand, and Shrove Tuesday. Pancake Day!

It's debatable where the origins of Shrove Tuesday comes from, but we look at Shrove Tuesday as the day when people would gather everything they had in the pantry and put it together and eat this great big feast. And then they go through a period of fasting. Valdis, do you know anything about that fasting? Why do we fast?

**Valdis:** It's a way of just being able to identify with what Jesus goes through in his lead up to the cross. I think there's always a problem with Lent in the sense that we might give up eating our favourite food, like our favourite big steak, or eating our favourite blocks of chocolate, drinking our favourite beer, or whatever it is, and then suddenly Easter comes around, "oh, I can go back to, what I was doing before, and it doesn't really become anything important, it's just something I've gone without for the 40 days of Lent and doesn't really prove anything."

Unless people are really concentrating on what Easter means and what all of the lead up to Easter is. Why am I giving up something for Lent if I do? It's because I really want to be able to identify with Jesus' journey to the cross.

**Jo:** Tania, do you give anything up over Lent?

**Tania:** Oh, look, to be quite honest, no, not a lot. I've been a bit of a wuss when it comes to that kind of thing. I've given up lollies, but I must admit that that's not real difficult for me. I guess I've certainly been mindful. I've thought about my character and where are the things that I could improve in my relationships with others? Now that's not something really I give up, but it's something to be aware of, and asking God for help in that. So, in a sense, that's my fast – to think about what I can do to be a person of hope and love in my family, with my friends, in my community.

**Jo:** Another thought I've been thinking about too is how we have this fantastic four-day holiday - we've got the Friday to the Monday. And for most people it's just a chance to get away and do your holiday time but for us as Christians I think it's quite a significant moment.

For Christians, Good Friday seems to be quite a difficult time of the year. Do you notice that?

**Valdis:** Quite often we're made to feel as if we have to be guilty for what happened to Jesus, that we have to also suffer like the Son of Man did. We have to really experience what Jesus went through. But we don't because it was done once and for all for us on the cross. We simply have to accept it. This is what happened and this is the good news that Jesus did rise from the dead and does save us from all wrongdoing and grants us therefore eternal life with God the Father.

**Jo:** With the Easter Sunday message, a lot of the times we have symbolisms of flowers and butterflies and new life and new birth. And so, I think that's the thing that is important to me is to identify that yes, there was that suffering. But he took it from us. He took the suffering from us. And so, what we do is we acknowledge the death with suffering, but then the outcome of it is this beautiful freedom, this freedom in Christ, this freedom of, new life.

**Tania:** That makes me think about, well what are the implications for how I live my life? When I hear the story of Easter, of God's love for me, that he sent his only son, came to the earth to be born as a baby, to live, to die, and come back to life for me, I mean, I'm gobsmacked. That's amazing!

When I'm reminded of that, I know that I want to live a life that's filled with joy and filled with love. It certainly is a life that's filled with hope and I'm keen to tell others about that story, too, because it gives me that comfort and joy. Even when times are rough, even when, you know, relationships mightn't be wonderful or there might be something going on at work or something going on in the family. But I've still got that joy because I know that God loves me.

**Jo:** So, you're putting a lot of emphasis on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. What happens in that middle bit, an Easter Saturday?

**Valdis:** Holy Saturday, yeah.

**Jo:** So, what are we meant to be doing in that time?

**Valdis:** Growing up Latvian, Saturday was a quiet day. An absolute quiet day when we weren't allowed to make any noise at all and I remember our daughter, who's now an adult, saying she couldn't stand having to be quiet Easter Saturday. That's supposed to be the time when we reflect on the fact that Jesus has died, and we're just waiting very quietly, very patiently for Easter Sunday.

It's an interesting tradition. It does still happen in certain countries as well. The fact of having a Holy Saturday, which is difficult to do, obviously, in our day and age with so much going on. But I suppose it's worthwhile if we can some way remain reflective about Easter on that in-between-time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

I can certainly see some benefits having a quiet Saturday and reflecting on what's happened.

**Tania:** I actually think it makes for a good sort of mental health day to be meditating, to be thinking about what God has done for me, what that means for my life, it actually sounds really quite peaceful.

**Jo:** For some of us who do go to church, it is like three worship services in a week, and that's exhausting. But I do like your message of understanding what Easter Sunday brings. You do need to allow the time in that space to reflect, to be peaceful, to be concentrating on what message of Easter really is for you.

We have so many holidays these days, public holidays, and all that, and I think sometimes the message gets lost of why we actually do have the time off. It's so much easier to think, "yay, I get another sleep-in day," "yay, I get another day to go out boating or, have a swim!" But to actually be intentional with our time when we do have it off.

**Tania:** Valdis, you're a pastor and you've preached at Easter time for many years so you're telling the same story over and over again. What's the message that you'd like to convey?

**Valdis:** The relevance for it is and the importance is for each one of us that Easter is very real. It was a very real historical event, and it's really important to us because it gives us life, it gives us hope.

**Tania:** I can kind of get how someone would sacrifice their life for someone really important. And you know, you hear stories, in the media of a father who is rescuing their children caught in a rip and then the father's life is sacrificed for the sake his children or for the sake of a child or other people's children. And I get that.

I can't fathom that God is prepared to sacrifice his son for me. That's amazing.

**Valdis:** God's word tells us "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us and lavished upon us, that we should be called the children of God."

And because we are the children of God, as you just said now, Tania, he does care for us. And that's why we have this incredible life changing event in history.

There's so much going on in the world we crowd out any thoughts about Jesus, God the Father. But we have a real hope in things better than they can be. It's not life as good as it gets.

**Jo:** So that really is a significant message of hope for all of us, for all people, to have that great sense of a God who loves even me.

**Tania:** Hi, I'm Tania Nelson and you've been listening to *Messages of hope*. You can watch videos, listen to podcasts, and read free booklets on this topic and many other challenges we face in life to discover that there is hope at [messagesofhope.org.au](http://messagesofhope.org.au). And you can also subscribe for free to this weekly program at [messagesofhope.org.au](http://messagesofhope.org.au). or for a free booklet call 1800 353 350. That's 1800 353 350. Thank you for listening to *Messages of hope*.

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