

Speeches at Paul Barker's Final Service

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] Well, that was great. Please have a seat. And we come now to that part where we recognise that today is the day.

It's finally here. It's Paul's final service at Holy Trinity Doncaster. And it's great to have so many people here. We had well over 400 people for lunch and we're expecting even more for afternoon tea.

And I just want to say a big thank you to all those folks who've helped to get things together for the day. The youth group were here on Friday night and they were having all sorts of fun, putting up decorations, posters and all sorts of stuff.

And then yesterday morning we had wall-to-wall bodies, all age groups, setting up tables, working in the kitchen, just doing whatever needed to be done to make sure that today was a good day.

And it was really great to see. But I want to say a very big and a special thank you, particularly to Sharon Matthew, who masterminded the whole catering thing.

[1 : 14] And she had some great help from Yvonne Wills. I think they enjoyed it. Only took them a couple of months and they did a really great job. And you guys should feel really pleased, Sharon and Yvonne, with the way things have worked and come together.

So from all of us, a very big thank you. APPLAUSE Well, we've come together today to mark Paul's transition in ministry from vicar to a semi-itinerant preacher and teacher.

This is a new role, not only for Paul, but a new role within CMS. And it's one which seems to make really good use of his God-given abilities. And it's something in which I'm sure we all encourage and support for him.

Now, as you know, Paul was instrumental in establishing our Mandarin congregation here over 10 years ago. And he's been a very strong supporter of David and Esther over that entire time.

So Esther will now come and say a few words in Mandarin. Thank you.

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Paul  Paul 
 
 Great

Thanks Esther Well we've come along quite an emotional road I guess since Paul made his announcement on Mother's Day and as I was thinking about how to talk about

Paul's ministry among us my mind went back to another Sunday in May it was just after he made his announcement and on that day there were three interesting and relevant expositions you may remember some of them the first was quite a dramatic headline a week to forget for a sad bitter champion the second same day was Paul's sermon at 10 o'clock on Acts chapter 20 verses 17 to 38 and the final exposition that came to mind on the same day was Paul's evening sermon which was Colossians chapter 3 which was Colossians chapter 3 it started at verse 18 and went through to the beginning of chapter 4 now these were quite three different expositions but their significance I think is that they provide a good framework to talk about Paul's ministry over the last 13 and a half years so the first one the week to forget for a sad bitter champion this was Caroline Wilson writing in the Sunday Age about a footballer who just reached his 300th game of AFL now that's quite a significant milestone and one that's not reached by many players this player as well as having reached 300 games had won two AFL premierships and he'd also won the Brownlow medal he was obviously a very good player but here at the end of his 300th game there was some confusion among the other players in the team it'd be normal to hoist the 300 game a high on the shoulders of a group of players and then head off and carry him over to the fans but here there was some hesitation the players in the team were unsure what to do and then two of them only two picked him up carried him a lot for a few seconds and put him down again only a few seconds there was no sense of joy or excitement in what should have been quite a significant day in this star footballer's life

Caroline Wilson went on to say how sad it was that this player will be remembered as a consultant to the team and not as a team member here was somebody who did his bit for the team but never actually gave himself personally well I thought what a marked difference to Paul's playing career with us I'm not sure what the equivalent is of 300 games but those of you who were here on Friday night will recall it by Paul's estimation which I think would be plus or minus about a half his assessment was that he had preached 1100 times that's quite significant and so Paul is a great champion but he's also taken a very personal interest in us and in our lives he's entered our hearts and the proof of that is the pain that we're feeling as we go through this separation process

Paul has been a friend a shepherd and a minister as he's walked with us on our life's journey now I know we'll all have different memories and we'll have different reasons to be thankful for his ministry among us and his personal commitment to us for some it'll be times of joy might be weddings the birth of a child children growing up to know the truth of God's love for others it'll be times of sadness there'll be illness pain loss of capability or grieving the death of someone close but whether our memories are those of joy and gladness or those tinged with sadness and grief Paul has been there walking with us on the journey bringing the assurance of God's presence as well as his love he has shown love he has involved himself in our lives and he's given generously of himself and for that we are really appreciative now the second exposition to look at was Paul's sermon on that day it came from Acts chapter 20 and if I can be so bold as to summarise the main points if I don't get it right you've got the right reply afterwards Paul the Apostle Paul is saying his farewells to the church at Ephesus and he tells them to remember what he had been in other words how he had lived and what he had taught and as I reflected on this passage it seemed like an appropriate testimony to Paul Barker as well the Apostle says in this passage that he served with humility and tears not hesitating to preach anything that would be helpful and declaring the need to turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus that I think is also an accurate description of Paul Barker's ministry among us

[11 : 34] Paul has lived among us as a servant leader he has been a great example of faithfully following Jesus and using all of his God-given talents for the benefit of the kingdom Paul's leadership within the parish has seen the church grow in numbers and in commitment anybody who's been on vestry or who is a regular reader of the published minutes will know that every year begins with a planning day but it's not a normal planning day it's not about what we will need to do for the next year these discussions are about what the parish is going through and will need to do in the next five years or longer Paul has a natural capacity to think and plan strategically and so at Holy Trinity we've seen the establishment of a Mandarin congregation which is then followed by bilingual services so we now have five congregations that meet every Sunday we've recently added a midweek afternoon service we've established a website that we use to provide worldwide access to the teaching that we receive week by week we do this through the recorded sermons and again for those of you who are here on Friday evening you'd have seen the new website which was launched which makes it even easier for people to access the teaching that we get we have an increasing number of people moving into full time service in various forms of ministry and not surprisingly a number of ministries within the parish have been progressively expanded and are continually resourced with very effective people just thinking here there's the pastoral care there's our children's ministry youth ministry and others we have close links with a number of missionaries overseas and we have stronger links with local schools the ESL program has been an effective evangelistic outreach for many years we've established a library which is both well managed and well used we have an active prayer ministry across the parish and we've also seen significant growth in our Bible study groups and various other groups that meet on a regular basis that's quite a listing of new and growing initiatives that have developed under Paul's leadership and of course you can't do this sort of thing unless you have good people something else which has been very important to Paul is that he's always been very thoughtful in relation to staff appointments and as a result of that as a parish we've been blessed by always having very capable and a hard working ministry team throughout the period of time

Paul has been here now I'm pretty sure that they were all planning to be here today I have seen some and I hope the others are also here it'll be a great chance to renew friendships but it's particularly great to see Paul Dudley who's made a flying visit from Sydney for the day so please make sure you catch up with Paul and it's really great to see you Paul there's a lot of Pauls in this isn't there just getting back to Paul Barker now Paul has also been active in a leadership role outside of the parish he's been an archdeacon for a good number of years as well as being active in a number of other bodies in the diocese in fact Paul is well known through the diocese for his hard work but not only his hard work but also for his absolute reliability and for doing the very best at whatever he does and I know from personal experience that he puts in an extraordinary amount of effort to make sure that he actually completes whatever it is he says that he's going to do and of course

Paul has been active beyond Melbourne as well he's undertaking periods of teaching at various theological colleges around Asia and as a parish we've been privileged to be part of that and support his work one of the things that we do is to allow him to take three weeks each year for this type of outreach but in Paul's case his commitment has been such that he's often used his own annual leave to extend that period of time and to maximise his teaching around Asia in theological colleges that's something that we're really pleased to participate in and it's going to be great to see it developing even further in the years ahead now to get back to the third exposition on that Sunday that I referred to Paul preached on this in the evening service it was part of the series on Colossians and as I listened to the passage being read before the sermon

I thought this is going to be interesting the passage was from Colossians chapter 3 it started at verse 18 and it started off with wives obey your husbands I thought that's interesting and game he's a single fellow going to help the relationship with my wife and I must say I wasn't disappointed a contentious topic but Paul in his usual way didn't shirk anything he addressed the whole thing head on now as you would know this passage talks about wives husbands children fathers slaves and masters he tackled them all in the same thoughtful and biblical approach as he always does Paul has that ability to take what can be quite a profound truth or a difficult concept and make it simple to understand and then having done that he moves on to encourage us to apply the teaching practically in our daily lives so the answer to wives submitting to husbands came down to three words seek

Christ above he then moved on to husbands and their behaviour and the answer here was quite simple the same three words seek Christ above his sermon then moved through the other relationships that are so fundamental to our daily lives and it began to dawn on me the answer to everything that night was seek Christ above and as we think about Paul's work among us for the last thirteen and a half years that simple phrase seems to encapsulate his ministry his focus among us has been that we should seek Christ above and then serve him faithfully in all aspects of our lives through to our final breath Paul has done this through his teaching and through his actions and the way he lives his life he's done what must be one of the hardest things for a preacher to do he's actually listened to the content of his own sermons and he's applied the teaching in his own life the proof of that is the step that he's now taking moving from the relative comfort of being a parish vicar to the role of being a semi-itinerant preacher in quite a different culture so Paul we are thankful to

[19 : 39] God for the gifts that he has blessed you with and we are thankful to God for the way that you have exercised these gifts in your ministry at Holy Trinity you have used these gifts as a pastor as a leader as a shepherd and as a teacher you've encouraged us as a parish to support you and work with you in the spread of the gospel God has used you in a tremendous way to our benefit we have grown in knowledge and love of him under your ministry ministry we trust that God will strengthen you in your future ministry and that you will continue to seek Christ above so that he will use you mightily for this important work that you're about to undertake you can be confident that for our part we will continue to support you in prayer as well as financially now just as the early church gave the apostle

Paul a gift of money as he left them and he headed off to Jerusalem on the next part of his journey so we have a gift for you as you get ready to leave on the next stage of your journey we also have a gift of money and a small memento that we hope will remind you of your service in a church that comprised two language groups English and Mandarin why don't we share our thanks to God and our appreciation to Paul with a loudest round of applause this building has ever heard well thank you we don't need a sermon now and I'm told I should open these so thank you for the gift of money which will be very useful and something in a black box oh my goodness

God is the strength of my heart so thank you and there's one more to go and this is a God with you the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go from Joshua chapter 1 so thank you very much I want to make a few words by way of response of course my brothers and sisters in recent weeks I have been amazed and overwhelmed by your generosity your cards letters gifts encouragement support and love

I'm truly astonished and humbled by the presence of so many people here today I know some of you have delayed going away some of you have deliberately returned in time for today I think three people came back from overseas yesterday some have made special efforts to be here from recovery from surgery like Audrey and others thank you some of you are here despite ill health and Paul as has been mentioned has preached this morning in Sydney and flown down here for lunch and will fly back this afternoon and thank you Paul in particular that you are here means an enormous amount to me I also want to add my thanks to what Eric said thank you to Sharon and Yvonne for overseeing an incredible catering job to the youth groups and young adults and many others for helping to set up to cook afternoon tea and clear up I assume in the later time of the day to decorate and to organise

I am very grateful indeed I think there were 490 coming for lunch and we think probably closer to 600 here now and I do encourage you to please keep in touch through CMS using the prayer card and you'll get my newsletters each month if you indicate that to CMS on Friday night at the annual meeting I spoke at greater length of my reminiscences and highlights and thanks and that is for every church member in the pigeon hole there are plenty of spares on top of the pigeon holes for those who don't have one and it's also translated into Chinese for the Mandarin congregation on top of the pigeon holes for today and I do encourage you to read that in which I paid particular thanks to God for so many people there I paid tribute to an outstanding staff team past and present for the past 13 and a half years and it's a huge joy to me today that I think all the staff members who've served with me at Holy Trinity with the exception of Steve Brown and Michelle

[25 : 24] Codrington who couldn't be here are here today I think Hilary Roth was coming after her church annual meeting Phil Muleman Carol Elpherson Paul Dudley Tim Johnson I think is coming though I haven't seen him Rod McArdle Warwick Grant Melissa Brown Lisa Brown Matt Stevens Ian Wyckart as well as Ruth Plum Sue Collier and Ainsley Walker and some former students I think are here as well as former parishioners whom it's also great to see including my first Vickers Warden Alan Thomas who's come up from Ocean Grove and Bowen Heads I am really humbled by your presence and thank you for the big effort to all of you for being here on a hot afternoon for this occasion I'm so grateful to God for many outstanding fellow workers here leaders of groups church wardens vestry members leaders of Bible study groups people who've served in so many many different ways over these past 13 and a half years this has been a remarkable church to serve abounding with godly generous and ministry minded people and it is a huge privilege to have been here let me say

I consider that I've received far more than I have given I have learned much more than I have taught I've been blessed much more than I deserve as I said on Friday night for approaching 14 years you have all shown me extraordinary love and support beyond anything that I've earned or deserve in that you have modelled to me God's grace consistently for your countless words of encouragement notes of thanks for your acts of generosity gifts and hospitality for your forgiving and forbearing love for your consistent prayers I'm deeply indebted to you and thankful to God as Ben commented to me before the service looking at some of the photos as the bilingual congregation were looking at them they noticed that I'm leaving with many more white hairs than I came with and indeed many more kilograms as well there's a white hair for each person I expect at least many ministers leave their ministry somewhat worn out or embittered disenchanted or jaded others are just eager to move on to something new but none of that is really true of me to this my last day here it is an excitement and a joy to be your pastor and to see the glory of Jesus in our midst and in your lives but remember that vicars come and go and I have every confidence that God who worked in this church for 140 years before I came on the scene will do so for many many many more years after

I have gone by God's grace I leave with an overflow of happy memories I leave with eternal friends by the dozen and I leave happily in the knowledge of your ongoing partnership in the gospel in this world which belongs to our God and heavenly father and from the bottom of my heart thank you and thanks be to God thank you very much