

SEPTEMBER 4, 2016

# FATHER'S DAY

ELDER  
IRENE BOUZO

**Texts: Philippians 3:12-14**

**Running purposefully toward the goal**

**Musician: Dr Irene Kemper**

**Music: Beautiful Child by Archie Roach**

**Hymns:**

**70 Mit dem Herrn fang alles an (German only)**

**17 Brueder singt ein Lied der Freude/ Come sing  
a song of joy**

**86 One more step (English only)**

**Prayer: The Lord's Prayer**

**Irene plays opening piano piece**

**Welcome**

Dear friends, welcome to our Father's Day Templer service. A warm welcome especially to the fathers who are here today and that includes grandfathers, great grandfathers and men who have been a father-figure for someone else.

**Introduction**

I'm going to talk about:

1. Our text from the letters of Paul about running purposefully towards the goal
2. Then I'll tell you three stories about what different fathers gave their children

**Background to text**

Our Bible text today is from one of Paul's letters to

his faith community in the city of Philippi, a colony in the Roman Empire during the first century. Philippi was in north-eastern Greece where Paul founded his first Christian congregation in Europe. Our text is about running purposefully towards a higher goal and seeking perfection. It is his third letter to that community where he gives them his advice.

Most of what we know about Paul is that he wrote letters that somehow were saved, copied, and eventually compiled as part of The New Testament of the Bible. In fact they make up about half of the New Testament. It is fair to say that Paul is an enormously important figure in Christianity - indeed, he is often considered second only to Jesus in significance. Paul's letters were a renewed attempt to follow the original aims and vision of Jesus. Paul has an enduring, authoritative voice and is considered by some as the 'second founder' of Christianity.

I usually base a lot of my thinking about the Bible on the ideas of the Jesus Seminar established in the 1980s in America and inspired by the writings of Strauss a peer of our founder. Recently I was disappointed to see that the Jesus Seminar no longer exists. Then I was delighted to see that it lead to the formation of the new Westar Institute that continues the religious, historical research of the Jesus Seminar.

A book The Authentic Letters of Paul (McGaughy et al 2010) by the scholars and theologians of the

Westar Institute, analysed Paul's letters in depth. They found that his writings about the teachings of Jesus were sometimes distorted by other writers who interfered with his letters. They most likely wrote in his name to keep that voice of authority. The Westar Institute scholars considered the letters to the Philippians as one of the most authentic of Paul's letters. I am inspired by the simplicity and depth of his wisdom.

### **Bible text**

Our Bible text today is from the third letter in the Bible chapter of the Philippians. The message is about seeking the goal of perfection and pressing on rather than looking back. Paul was addressing a community made up of war veterans and their next generation.

### **Bible life hacks**

Before I read the Bible text for today I want to show you how I choose which Bible to read from. [give a short Bible life hacks talk]

- I have several Bibles at home
- My older Bible has special, personal things in it – King James Version
- Another KJV from the op shop – maps in the back of Paul's travels – looks like from here to Queensland but in his time it was as if he went to the earth to spread his message to faith communities.
- One of my children's Bibles – the New International Version – It has a scribble from my nephew in the beginning of the Book of Genesis. I use this the most as it's easy to understand but I always cross check against the KJV for a deeper insight.
- Two days ago I found the Common Bible – endorsed by major faith groups and cost \$5.95 in 1973.

### **Authenticity of Paul's letters hacks**

- Show 3 pages of the Philippians in the Common Bible

### **Read Bible text**

I'll read the Bible text for today from the Common Bible. It's from Paul's letters to his faith community, the followers of Jesus in the city of Philippi.

### **Philippians 3:12-14**

*12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or that I have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Jesus Christ took hold of me.*

*13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead.*

*14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God had called me upwards in Christ Jesus.*

### **Hymn 70 Mit dem Herrn fang alles an**

Let's start with a hymn. We'll sing Hymn number 70 Mit dem Herrn fang alles an

We have to sing it in German as I noticed there is no English translation for this one. We'll sing all three verses. Please remain seated.

### **My detailed commentary on the text**

The people of Paul's community in Philippi could relate to him for he had experiences of suffering as they did under the Roman domination and oppression.

You see, the city of Philippi was settled by a lot of war veterans from diverse cultural backgrounds and diverse armies. Some were granted more land than others. Philippi was famous for its fertile plain – some farmers did very well. Philippi was also known for its mountain range, where there were gold and silver mines. A lot of people became wealthy in that city and others were quite economically disadvantaged.

There were clearly economic differences during Pauls' time. Some former soldiers were forcibly resettled from places in Italy so that they wouldn't pose a threat to the authorities there. It sounds a bit to me how post-civil-war Syria might look in a few years.

If anything, the Romans had a practical attitude to religion, as to most things. They had difficulty in taking to the idea of a single, all-seeing, all-powerful god of the new Christians and the teachings of Jesus.

Paul's Philippian faith community would have been considered trouble-makers. They would most likely have refused to honour the Roman gods and goddesses, and they probably persuaded others to do the same.

Paul in his letter encouraged his community to "press on toward the goal to win the prize", a bit like the athletes in the Olympic Games. "Forget what is behind" he says and "and strain towards what is ahead." And he goes on to say, "Win the prize for which God had called me upwards in Christ Jesus."

Many Christian theologians interpret that as an upward call to heaven, with Jesus as the saviour through life after death. I think saviour has a different meaning here.

The Roman emperors were often called "saviours." References to Christ would be seen as political in

that context. A saviour who comes to the State to rescue his people would be seen as a comparison, a competitor or more seriously a threat to the legitimate authority of the Emperor saviour. It poses the question: What if the people believe that only Christ has the power to provide peace and security to the community? Later in the letter in Philippians 3:20-21 Paul clearly proclaims Jesus is Lord and Cesar is not. The notion of saviour is to provide a safe and just society through the teachings of Jesus in life on earth, not necessarily in an after-life. So Paul and his followers were seen as dangerous dissidents.

The Roman Empire was a political and military force. Most Philippian Christians were probably Greek not Roman. The people of Philippi had seen terrible battles. They remembered how the peace in the region had been shattered especially in the time of their fathers. Let's not forget that Paul was talking to the Philippians who were the offspring of the war veterans. They would have memories of the hate and suffering that is in the hearts of traditional enemies.

Paul was giving people practical advice, encouragement and was trying to persuade them about striving for a world more perfect, a world of peace and harmony, of mutual respect; a lovely world that is pure and just, where social justice prevails. He cautions them not to look back.

This reminds me of the South Sudanese migrants and refugees I meet through my work. We had a South Sudanese mature-age intern from Victoria University called Tut at my work. I asked him what project he wanted to work on and he said bringing the Dinka and Nuer tribes together in one room.

Those two tribal groups had committed untold brutalities against each other in the African Sudan. It was the first time I was with refugees from those war-torn regions and I was afraid they would fight

and I said no – so we did a different, safer project. I got to know some of the Dinka and Nuer tribal people and some who were boy soldiers who committed untold atrocities. I saw the humanity and gentleness in them. They told me how they were forced to do bad things and wanted to move forward and live a better life.

At the end of that project I got to know Tut a lot better – he was a Baptist pastor in Footscray. I said to him, “They weren’t going to fight with each other, were they? I can see that now.” and he said, “No, Irene, they weren’t.” He saw the gentleness in the people. I apologised to Tut for doubting his good intentions and for being afraid of those people. He said that was OK.

The Roman Emperors in ancient times seemed to have brought a measure of peace to the region of Philippi. However, they could not bring peace to the hearts of men and women. They could not be the saviours.

In some other letters to the Philippians Paul wrote about the “peace of God” which will surpass all understanding (Phil 4:7). He said that this peace would come by meditating on the God of Peace and the things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8–9). He tells the people to press on and not look back – an important message for war veterans.

In our Bible text Paul is humble. He admits that he is not perfect. He says, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or that I have already been made perfect, but I press on ... because Jesus Christ has made me his own.” He meant that none of us is perfect, but we can strive for the goal of perfection.

These days it’s easy to forget about long-term goals. Our busy lifestyles are geared around short-term goals and immediate gratification. “I want that treat, that prize now and I can get it easily.” Or we

focus our goals on our physical self. A few days ago in the office at my work, I saw the German Welfare Society newsletter in our staff room. The introductory article gave a practical list of goals to work towards for the physical and mental wellbeing of older people, such as turn off the TV, learn a language, improve your computer skills, cook meals even if on your own, watch your weight, and seek help when feeling depressed. I read them out to the staff and they said it was a really good list for them too.

Paul encourages us to press on, to aim for the ultimate prize. He is talking a spiritual goal. I think it’s good to be reminded of such higher goals in this busy world. In times of injustice or fear it can be hard to aim for perfection. Paul’s key message to us is steadfastness in seeking perfection; not giving up; not being distracted by past failings; pressing on and believing in the examples and teachings of Jesus. His advice to his religious community is to stick together, to walk together, to keep going forward and in that way they can make an immeasurable impact on the world.

### **Internet inspiration**

That message of pressing on ahead, shooting for the goal, aiming for the higher prize even when things seem to be going all wrong, reminds me of the popular inspirational internet sayings:

When the barn burnt down, I could see the moon.  
And another one...

Why don’t you aim high? Shoot for the moon. If you miss you’ll land amongst the stars.

### **My lightbulb moment of striving for perfection**

Paul’s message reminds me of a challenging time in my life. I have talked about that before. When I was going through the worst time of my life, I had to leave my job at a time when some great

promotional opportunities came my way; one of my children had a life threatening illness that seemed hopeless; the other was disengaged at school; I was going through financial stress; my mother was ill and moving into a nursing home and my nerves were frazzled to the extreme. Things couldn't get much worse.

One day I sat for several hours in silence and meditated, reflected. I suddenly came to the realisation, in a kind of lightbulb moment; that my life was unfolding perfectly; that, with all the bad things that were happening to me, I was on a journey that was leading me towards a state of perfection in the universe. In that moment all my challenges became more bearable.

When I look back I see that things got better. There were losses and sorrows on the way, but there were other moments of joy and warmth to be treasured. I needed the strength to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call to a state of perfection". In our Bible text Paul calls on us to press forward, to forget what is behind and focus on straining towards what is ahead. I think he didn't mean to forget the warm moments of healing, but he meant to forget the suffering, to believe that our lives, with all our difficulties and frustrations, are unfolding perfectly.

### **Mothers and fathers**

My mother used to say whenever a door closes, a window opens. That's been a powerful message that gets me through the tough times. It's often easier to remember what our mothers taught us because, for many of us, they were our main nurturers. Sometimes it's not as easy to reflect on what our dads taught us.

It's Father's Day today. I would like to reflect, for a moment, on the great things our dads gave us by telling you three stories.

### **Story 1**

My first story is about a father's pain and love, especially when things go seriously wrong. Paul, in our Bible text, was a thinker and a visionary. He could imagine a better world for all, not just a few. He was able to glimpse what it means to live beyond tribal and ethnic boundaries. He considered the outsiders, the outcasts as equals. He felt compassion for "the rag-tag communities of nobodies." He had the remarkable ability to treat the "nobodies" of the world with great compassion, without prejudice, without arrogance and without judgement.

The story I'm going to tell you is about one of "the nobodies" of our world, a wild child whose name we don't even know. It's an indigenous father-son story.

### **An indigenous father-son story**

This story is a tribute to the Indigenous People of Australia. The Aboriginal people belong to this place, to the land and the water and the sky. Migrants understand that only too well, because of their nostalgic connection to the land, the water and the skies they left behind.

I respectfully acknowledge the unique position of the First Peoples of Australia. I pay my deep respect to the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today, to the Kulin nation and to their elders past and present.

My story is about the young Aboriginal men locked up in mandatory detention in the Northern Territory. Earlier this year I was at the Multicultural Piers Festival at Port Melbourne. I was delighted to catch the live performance of Archie Roach, the famous Australian Indigenous singer. He sang a song that I love. It is about a father's unconditional love for a young boy who had become a wild child.

It was the first time I saw Archie in real life. He connected with us in the audience so well that I felt he was talking just to me from his microphone on the stage. He told us the tragic story of a beautiful child who kept going to jail, then in the end never came home but was free at last.

It's the story of a father's unconditional love for a wild child who went down the wrong path. Archie said that he wrote this song for a young man he knew who was locked up in the Northern Territory. Archie wasn't the boy's biological father but he felt a deep fatherly love for him.

Clearly the boy was considered criminal by the system and had done some bad things. Archie remembered him as a gentle child, a beautiful child. He saw him as a young, innocent boy who was not to blame for the wrongs he committed. He tells us of the last smile on the boy's face that gave a glimpse of a beautiful soul and he wished he was with him right now, his beautiful child.

Please sit back and think about a father's unconditional love for his children as we listen to Archie Roach singing Beautiful Child.

### **Music**

Play CD Beautiful Child by Archie Roach.

### **My comment on the song**

If Paul, who wrote the letter to the Philippians, had been around today I think that his message might have been that the boy was not to blame but that we are all to blame; that the system is at fault and that we should press on seeking a more perfect world of social justice and peace where we don't punish young Aboriginal boys so harshly.

Sometimes dads get angry with their children when they misbehave or don't meet their expectations. Sometimes it takes a hard jolt before a father

appreciates or remembers the purity and innocence that is in every child; and for an angry dad to become gentle again and acknowledge the love in his heart.

### **Prayer**

Let us pray for humanity and social justice, and for a father's love.

I invite you to stand, if you are able for the Lord's Prayer (the page after hymn 129 in the red hymnbook).

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us when in temptation and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.

Please be seated.

### **Story 2**

Here's my second story. It's often the simple things that we remember most fondly about our dads.

My story is about my childhood memory of my father Abram Dyck. I've told you this one before but it's so powerful in its simplicity and its lifelong impact on me that I'll tell you again. I was very young. We'd spent days making a home-made kite out of paper, sticks, glue and string. My Papa kept saying how he hoped that the kite would fly well.

We were excited when we went outside into the garden behind our house in Bayswater to try and fly the kite. The wind was wild and the kite flew high up

into the sky. We children took turns to hold the string. I couldn't wait for my turn and when I did the wind was so strong that the string whipped through my small fingers and away up into the sky until the kite disappeared in the clouds. As the tears of embarrassment, disappointment and a little fear welled up in my eyes, my Papa said, looking up, "Yes that's a very good kite. It flies very well."

My dad's lesson to me was don't lose sight of the bigger goal and don't get bogged down in the petty disappointments or the things we did in the past. Even though that was over 50 years ago the feeling of looking up and striving forward with that kite is so intense for me, I could honestly say again that with all my disappointments, my life is unfolding perfectly. And I can still say about my dad, I wish I was with him right now, so he could see it.

Hymn 17 Brueder singt ein Lied der Freude/Come sing a song of joy.

Let's sing Hymn 17 Brueder singt ein Lied der Freude/Come sing a song of joy. You may choose to sing in English or German. We'll sing verses verses 1, 2 and 3. Please remain seated.

### Story 3

My third story goes like this:

Last week I had a 7.30am breakfast meeting with some lecturers from Monash University. One of them was Michael, a thirty-something dad with a great professional job. He travelled all over the world regularly through his work to discuss digital education and international conflict resolution in countries such as Iraq, Timor, Myanmar, Egypt, and the USA.

He said he had an 8 year old boy. He told me how he was trying to be a good dad and balance his little boy's computer-and-screen time, that is typical of children these days, with some regular outdoor

exercise in nature. He went on bush walks with his son and tried to listen to his little boy's stories about school and his friends.

Then I asked Michael, "What's the greatest thing your dad gave you?" He thought for a moment and then said there were three things:

1. The first was a great backyard in the suburbs. He said when he was a child he loved his backyard. Their house backed onto the bush where he spent endless hours in nature. It made him feel supremely happy and peaceful. He would never forget how he played in that backyard. He developed a deep love for nature and he tried to bring that into his work and family life. He said his dad gave him that backyard.
2. Secondly he said his dad talked to him a lot about morality and ethics and that made a deep impression on his life and gave him a compass to help steer through his life's pathway.
3. The third thing his dad gave him was the ability and the permission to ask questions. His dad encouraged him to ask any questions – even questions, he said, that would challenge the church thinking of his Catholic faith. That's not meant to be criticism as he seemed like a strong believer, but he said it was good to ask questions.

They were the great things his dad gave him especially the backyard that inspired him to go on those long walks in the bush with his little boy.

### Hymn

Our next hymn is One More Step. It could be about a father and child taking steps out into the big wide world together.

It could be about any of us travelling on our personal journeys through the world with the feeling

of strength that comes from the unconditional love that our fathers gave us.

Or it could be about us stepping out into the world, step by step, with the trust in the universe that comes from pressing forward towards the ultimate goal of perfection.

Hymn 86: One more step (English only).  
Let's sing hymn no 86. One more step. This one's only in English. We'll sing all 5 verses. Please remain seated

### **Conclusion**

Let's thank our dads...

To the dads who gave us a great backyard and a love of nature, we thank you.

To the dads who taught us about ethics and morality and how to live a good and decent life, we say thank you.

To the dads, the elders and the father-figures in our lives who gave us permission to ask questions, we thank you for the intellectual freedom.

To the fathers who were angry and didn't know how to deal with the wild child in us, we say thank you for your unconditional love. It's never too late to feel it or to show it. We say thank you and non-one is to blame.

Our service today is a tribute to all fathers; to the fathers in this room; to the fathers in our families and the fathers in our memories.

On behalf of everyone here I thank our fathers for taking good care of us. To all our fathers we thank God for you.

It's Father's Day today and it's time for us to take care of you. That could be part of our mission on our journey towards perfection.

As you leave here I invite you to think of the greatest thing your dad gave you and then thank him for that when you see him or simply thank him in your heart if he is not here with us.

### **Irene plays final piano piece**

### **Thanks**

I wish you a Happy Father's Day

On behalf of everyone here I thank Irene for our lovely musical accompaniment.

I also thank those who helped prepare our flowers and lovely surroundings and the morning tea.

### **Final remark**

That's the conclusion of our service.

Have a lovely day with your families, fathers and grandfathers

### **End**