

**"Do You Stand Out?"**

BACK TO SCHOOL SUNDAY

Aug. 30, 2020

Exodus 3: 1-15

*<sup>1</sup> Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.*

*<sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." <sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

*<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." <sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign*

*for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."*

*<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

*<sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.*

## Romans 12: 9-21

*<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written,*

*"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*



As our schools prepare to begin a new school year, we begin our new sermon series, "Learning to Love Our Enemies". During this series we will wrestle with our

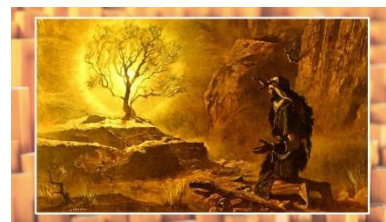
capacity to love. Our capacity to love is great when we are talking about someone who is near and dear to us – our spouse, our children, our parents. Our capacity remains pretty big when we are talking about people we enjoy being around – our friends, our teammates, our small group members. But when we are talking about people we do not really want to be around or about people who have hurt or betrayed us? Well, if we are being honest, it can be a struggle to truly and genuinely love these people. But if we are able to genuinely and unconditionally love even these, then we are reflecting the love of Christ out into the world. Having taught in the public schools for 23 years, I understand the challenge most students face in loving all of their classmates. As a teacher, I understood how that challenge applied to my fellow staff members. But the same can be said of all professions, of all families, of all groups of people that we interact with. Today, as we look at the question "Do You Stand Out?" we do so from the perspective of living out our Christian witness in the world around us. Whether at work, at school, on the court or field, at home –



we want to stand out in a way that reflects the light and love of Christ within us. As we prepare to do so today, let us begin with a word or prayer...

This morning we begin in the Old Testament, in Exodus 3. If you brought your Bible or want to use a pew Bible, please join me in Exodus 3. This is the beginning of Moses' call story. As the leader of the Hebrews, Moses will certainly stand out. We recall that Moses was born during a time of hardship for the Hebrews. Not only were they enslaved but Pharaoh had ordered that all the baby boys were drowned in the Nile. Moses escaped this fate, being rescued by Pharaoh's daughter. Growing up in her household, Moses became part of the Egyptian world. Here he too stood out – a child of slave parents being raised in the royal palace. Even though raised there, Moses remained connected to the Hebrews. Then one day, while out visiting his kinfolk, he killed an Egyptian who was harming a Hebrew. Moses then fled for his life to the land of Midian, in the western desert of the Arabian Peninsula. There he was taken in by Jethro. He married and began to tend his father-in-law's flocks. As we pick up the story today in Exodus 3, Moses is tending the sheep on Mount Horeb, the mountain of God.

There, an angel of the Lord appears to him *"in a flame of fire out of a bush"*. It draws Moses' attention because the bush is not being consumed. Moses turns aside to investigate. It was then that God called out, *"Moses, Moses!"* Moses responds to God, *"Here I am"*. God instructs Moses not to come any



closer and to take off his sandals – he is standing on *"holy ground"*. Holy is what

was and is associated with God. “Holy” describes God’s moral and ethical perfection. Moses must remove his sandals, lest he contaminate the holy ground. The soles of his sandals have touched common soil. They cannot now touch the holy ground that is all around God’s presence.

After God identifies himself as the God of Moses’ father, of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, Moses hides his face in fear. As Moses realizes where he stands – in the presence of a holy and powerful God – he is afraid to look at God. Then God announces why he has met Moses here on the sacred mountain. God has heard the cry of his people in Egypt and is filled with compassion, saying, “*I know their sufferings*”. It is as if God were suffering right along with the Hebrews. In response, God has decided to come down to deliver them from the oppressive and harsh hand of the Egyptians.

When I was about to enter sixth grade, my parents got divorced. My two best friends were from good Catholic families. Divorce was not well-accepted in the mid-1970s. As soon as the news got out, I did not have any best friends anymore. Walking to and from school alone, not having any friends to eat lunch with, to hang out with, to play with, I felt like I really stood out. I probably did. Thank goodness for football. One of my teammates, Chris LeMay, befriended me and included me in his circle of friends. Then, in the summer before my eighth-grade year my parents decided to get remarried and we moved to a new town. We moved over Thanksgiving weekend.



I was placed in a homeroom and given an open locker. The lockers were given out by home rooms, but all the "B" lockers were still full. My locker was in the middle of the F's. My locker was between the two lockers occupied by Leo Flanagan and Steve Flanders. I was about 5' tall and maybe 90 pounds soaking wet. Leo was a linebacker on the football team and Steve played defensive end. They were both about 6' tall and nowhere near 90 pounds. Leo decided it would be fun to pick on the new kid. Being brand new and wanting to fit in, I had no idea what to do and had no friends to go to my locker with.

About the third day Steve overheard Leo bullying me and told him to knock it off. Leo retorted something like: "What are you going to do about it"? That day after football practice Steve did something about it. I later learned there was a big fight after football practice that Friday. Leo never said another word to me. Now, I am not condoning or encouraging fighting when you have a problem at school or at work or on your team. Not at all. What I am saying, though, is that when you do have an opportunity to stop or to right a wrong, to stand up for someone who is unable to stand up for themselves, we are called as Christians to do so. This was just one of many, many experiences in 1978. Yet 42 years later I can still recall the details. I cannot tell you much else about eighth grade. But it did teach me about the responsibility that we have to look out for one another.

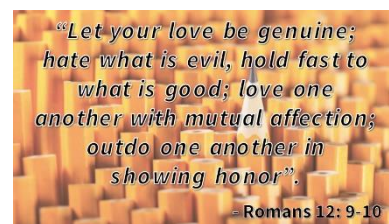
As God calls Moses, his response is not enthusiastic. Moses says to God, *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?"* It is the first of four excuses that Moses will try and give God. Moses is asking why it needs to be him who goes and stands

before Pharaoh, the most powerful man in all the earth. I think that is the first question we often wrestle with when trying to decide whether or not to do the right thing when doing the right thing does not seem easy. It is the first question I often ask when the Holy Spirit nudges me to speak out or to stand up for the weak and marginalized. Like Moses, we do not always want to answer the bell. We do not always willingly engage someone we see as more powerful than we are. God promises to be with Moses and then to send a sign after he brings his people out of slavery. Moses counters, worried that the Hebrews will not follow his lead. He wants to know what to say if they ask Moses, *"What is his name?"* This concern is also a concern we have.

We fear people asking on whose authority do we speak. We fear being asked what right we have to raise our voice for justice or fairness. God responds, *"I am who I am"*. God is saying, 'I am self-sufficient, I am self-existent, I am all-encompassing, I am without limits'. He tells Moses to tell the Hebrews that *"the LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you"*. Moses has been called to lead a liberation movement, to step into the halls of power, to be the voice of the holy and just God. Moses is concerned that the Hebrews are on board. He knows that he must have their support. He knows that this faith adventure is not a spectator sport. All will be expected to participate in God's grand plan. That was the story last week too, wasn't it? We are one body, each with gifts and talents to contribute to the building of the kingdom. We all have to be a part of the plan.

Turning to our passage from Romans 12, we get a few practical tips on how to stand out for the right reasons. Verses nine and ten are two of my favorites.

Read them with me: *"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor".*



Let your love be a brotherly love, a genuine and pure love. Show mutual affection to all people. *"Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good"*. The question for us today and for our students as they prepare to go to school is this: how do we do this at school, at work, in our homes? I believe we do this by modeling Jesus. Love led and guided all he did. When we strive to let love lead and guide all we do and say and think, we are beginning to live into this ideal form of love. When we do so, we stand out from among the crowd.



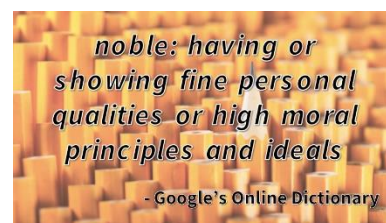
Continuing on, in verse thirteen, Paul writes, *"Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers"*. Paul is beginning to work out what these opening verses look like when lived out in real life. Yes, give to the needs of those who are believers and who need your support. But more than just giving food or clothing or even money, Paul tells us to *"extend hospitality"* – go beyond meeting needs to entering into relationships with those you are serving and ministering to – just as Jesus did. Paul continues to channel his inner Jesus in the next verse. In verse fourteen he writes, *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them"*. In Matthew 5 and in Luke 6 Jesus spoke of loving our enemies and of praying for them, of doing good and blessing those who hate and curse you. That would be like me buying Leo Flanagan lunch one day, right?



Yes, it would be doing that. It would not be easy. Not even if I saw him tomorrow. Paul continues this theme, in verse seventeen, saying, *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all"*. Noble in the sight of all. Noble especially in the sight of God, which we learned in our passage from Exodus means the all-encompassing eyes of God.

What does it mean to be "noble"? Google's online dictionary defines it this way:

*"having or showing fine personal qualities or high moral principles and ideals"*. Today we may consider the WWJD slogan – what would Jesus do? That would lead us to being noble, to showing high principles and ideals.



Talk about standing out in today's culture! In the example set by Jesus, this would be welcoming sinners, dining with prostitutes, touching lepers, not calling down lightning on the Pharisees, walking the path to the cross in silence. That is what Paul was talking about back in verse sixteen when he instructed us to not be *"haughty"* but to *"associate with the lowly"*. Again, sounds a lot like Jesus. We



do stand out when we intentionally hang out with those folks that Jesus would have hung out with. That is sitting with the new or unpopular kid at lunch or partnering up with them in science. That is including

that co-worker or teammate that no one else even really gives the time of day. Yes, we do stand out when we do such things. Others notice as we choose to be like Jesus. This is standing out in a good way.

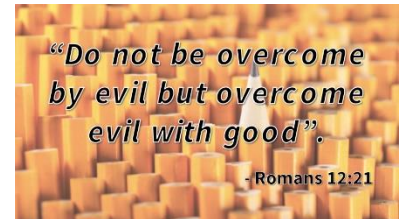
Two verses later, Paul calls on us to do what we can do. He knows that we will not be able to prevail and win every evil person over to God. In verse eighteen we read, *"If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all"*. Years later Bishop Reuben Job, a good North Dakota guy, would modernize John Wesley's three rules for Christian living. Calling them the "three simple rules", Job called Christians everywhere to "do no harm, do good, stay in love with God". This mantra that John Wesley and the early Methodists followed did make them stand out. And it cost them. There is that call to be a *"living sacrifice"* again, isn't it? Wesley's and then Job's call was a call to live peaceably with all – not just with your mom and dad, not just with your spouse and children, not just with the classmates and teammates and co-workers that you like. All. I might could live peaceably with those I do not really like or see eye to eye with. How about you?

If only Paul stopped there. Keeping my distance, I can live peaceably with just about anyone. In verses twenty and twenty-one he now returns to the theme he was working on in verse thirteen. Paul does not encourage us to keep our distance. He calls for just the opposite: *"if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink"*. How would we live this out today? Instead of giving the man or woman who is asking for \$5 for lunch, it would be inviting him to come and have lunch with you. Instead of expecting those without transportation to come to church on a Sunday, it would be driving the church van around in to pick them up. Instead of walking by the girl who is obviously struggling with something as she wipes away tears, it would be stopping and asking if she is okay and then walking with her to his next class.

Instead of ignoring the bully harassing the new kid, it would be stepping in and standing up for him. Yes, there are many ways that we can show Jesus' love. And each will make us stand out.

Paul closes our Romans passage with these words: *"Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good"*.

Don't let evil drag you down. Don't try to get even.



Don't join in on the lunchroom gossip. Don't be like most of the world. Stand up for your faith. Stand up for the weak and the marginalized. Stand up for good. Stand up for what is right. Stand up for Jesus. Be love in the world. Do good. As you prepare to head off to school tomorrow or in a week or so, as you ready yourself for work tomorrow, choose to stand out. Choose to be Jesus' love manifest in the world. Make a positive difference. Be amazed by what a random act of kindness, of love, can do in the world. Stand out for Christ. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. What would God have to do to get your attention and commitment to take on a new mission in life? How would you respond if God called you by name?
- 2) *Pray*. This week, how can you practice "love" and "peace" with your family? At work? In school? On your team? Pray for God's guidance and direction.
- 3) *Study*. Re-read Romans 12: 9-21. Which TWO of these commands are easiest for you to keep? Which TWO are the most difficult to keep? Why?