

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, September 13, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"STAND, THEREFORE... - Part 1 of 2"

Ephesians 6:10-20

The apostle Paul was in a Roman prison when he wrote his Letter to the church at Ephesus. He may even have been chained to a soldier who was guarding him. And if he wasn't chained to the soldier, Paul was certainly aware of his presence. It's helpful to keep Paul's situation in mind as we read this passage, for it gives us a good idea of where some of Paul's imagery came from.

Now Ephesians is full of enough deep theology to keep scholars busy for a long time. But in all his writings to the young churches, no matter how deep, Paul always ended with practical advice. Paul writes in 6:10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power." Paul tells us why Christians must be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Notice the word he repeats several times. Verse 11 - "Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil." verse 13, "Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to **withstand** on that evil day, and having done everything, to **stand** firm." Verse 14, "**Stand** therefore, ..." Did you hear Paul's repeated exhortation, "**Stand?**" Paul regarded standing as one of the most important things Christians can do. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power so that you can stand."

Paul did not mean that we are to "stand still." When I was about 10 I arrived home with my father after my Saturday hockey game, and sitting at the lunch table, told my mother, "I was outstanding today." And my father, God bless him, always a shrewd judge of hockey talent said, "You sure were. You were out there standing around." It was a much deserved deflation of my over-sized ego.

When Paul tells Christians to stand, he doesn't mean for us to stand around or stand still. But he knew that we must stand solidly before we can move ahead and move forward. A person who is standing on quicksand isn't going anywhere but down. But a person standing on solid ground is free to move, to react, to reach up and reach out.

Notice too, that we do not have to stand in our own strength and power. We stand in the strength and power of Christ. And the Lord's strength and power is renewed within us through worship. Now worship is first and foremost about

honouring and glorifying God and giving Him true worth. But as we do that blessings are given to us from above. One is that we receive strength and power from God. It is happening today. God is giving us strength and power to stand. "Stand therefore, Christians, in the strength and power of the Lord, stand."

Now it seems to me that there are five ways in which we stand. We Christians are to stand out, to stand on, to stand against, to stand for, and to stand with. Now I'm dealing with the first two today, and then three next week.

Stand therefore, Christians, stand out. "In the strength and power of the Lord stand out."

Those soldiers who guarded Paul knew who he was. He wasn't ashamed of his faith and the name he bore. In fact, he even was able to convert some of his jailors to Christ.

Our parents and grandparents lived in a time when it was assumed every good person was a Christian. Theirs was the world of Christmas pageants in schools, of the Lord's prayer being said at public gatherings. Our world is different, much different. We live in a post-Christian culture. We live with and beside people of different faiths or no faith at all. And it's in this world that we are called by Christ to be his witnesses to stand up and stand out for Jesus. Paul tells us that we are a letter, a message from Christ. So we Christians need to stand out by our words and by our deeds, by the very life we live.

Unfortunately, many Christians today are indistinguishable from the culture. Anthony Robinson, the theologian I've been reading recently, identifies one of the big weaknesses among Christians today as timidity. Many Christians seem ashamed of their faith, afraid to utter the name of Christ, to tell who we are and whose we are. People of other faiths are not afraid to stand out. Why are we? That doesn't mean shoving our faith down the throats of others or demanding their conversion. But standing out surely means not being silent about who we are. It means speaking more confidently about our spiritual convictions. I know this is a struggle for many of us. But we are not alone. The Lord helps us. He strengthens us to do it by his power. Paul tells us in 2nd Timothy, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control."

And it starts right where we are. If what I'm about to say sounds judgmental, know that I'm under the same judgement. Do your neighbours or co-workers know that you are a Christian? Someone once asked, "If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Well, would there? If someone looked at your schedule, your bookshelf, your checkbook, the

way you use Sunday, the things you give time and energy to, would they be able to say, "That's a Christian man or woman." I say this not to condemn anyone, but to challenge us. "Stand therefore, Christians, stand out. In the strength and power of the Lord stand out."

Here's the second thing. "Stand therefore, Christians. Stand on. In the strength and power of the Lord, stand on."

What are we standing on? Well, God has given us a solid rock, a solid foundation to stand on. It's the faith once delivered to the saints, the faith that is rooted in Scripture and finds expression in the creeds.

I wonder if we don't stand out sometimes because we're not sure of what we stand on. Anthony Robinson again. He writes, "I recently visited a so-called emerging church, meeting in a warehouse-type building. After 15 minutes of praise music the preacher began an hour-long sermon that was part of a series called, "Who Did Christ Die For?" He drew on theologians such as Augustine and Calvin and John Stott. The preacher's sermon was seriously theological. Looking around at the congregation, I marvelled at the number of twenty-and-thirty year olds, many of them taking notes." Robinson asks, "If I had preached a sermon (like that) would my congregation have even been interested?" He concludes, "The young people who sat in that emerging church were looking for truth and meaning to guide and inform their lives. They were looking for a place to stand."

You see, if we are going to stand out, then we have to know what we stand on. Some have criticised the United Church of Canada as being ignorant of theology, of not standing on anything. Actually, some of the church's theological statements over the years have been solid and orthodox. A few others, perhaps, not so much. But I'm not responsible for the denomination or what other congregations do. God has called me to serve and do my best for this congregation. And that's enough for me. And despite what some say, this congregation still stands on the solid rock of Christian faith. I take issue with those who say we now stand on nothing. We stand on the foundation of God the Father, our Creator, on Jesus Christ, his only Son, living a fully human life, suffering and dying to make atonement for the sin of this fallen world, rising again from the dead, alive forevermore and coming again as Lord and judge to complete God's Kingdom. We stand on the foundation of God's final victory over the power and the principalities of darkness and wickedness. We stand on the foundation of God with us and in us now by the power of the Holy Spirit. We stand on the Protestant principle of saved by grace through faith. We stand on the two sacraments - baptism and the Lord's Supper. We stand on the truth of God's forgiveness of sins. We stand on the hope and promise of eternal life. We stand on the foundation of Holy Scripture, intelligently studied and properly

interpreted as the final authority for Christian faith and practice.

Poet Maya Angelou speaks of her grandmother living through the Great Depression. What she most remembers most is her grandmother's wisdom and faith. Clasp her hands behind her back her grandmother would look up into the distant sky and say, "I will step out on the word of God." The great depression was a difficult time, "especially so for a single black woman in the South tending her crippled son and two grandchildren." But when faced with mountainous burdens, Maya's grandmother would face the sky and say, "I will step out on the word of God." And because of her grandmother Maya Angelou grew up knowing that the word of God had power. And today, whenever she experiences the injustices of the world, Maya remembers her grandmother's faith.

The rock of faith on which we stand is summarized in the Apostles' Creed which we say every Communion Sunday and which we will say together today after my message. It's a far better summary of the faith than the one I gave you. "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

Now of course, the foundation of faith is broad, and very few people stand in exactly the same place on it. We have different understandings. Different aspects speak to us or stand out to us. I don't expect someone else to stand in exactly the same place as I do. We don't ram the faith down peoples' throats. We teach and explain the faith in love. In some sermons I have dealt with some of the difficult issues in the Apostles' Creed. But we don't throw it out just because it's deep. We have a foundation to stand on, given to us by God in the Bible and through the church. I myself am still learning and digging into the faith. But the more I dig and the more I learn, the more solid and hope-filled I discover this foundation to be.

"Stand therefore Christians, stand on. In the strength and power of the Lord, stand on the firm foundation of faith."

Let me finish with this. We stand out and we stand on, because there is one who stands with us. Jesus is not only our Lord and Saviour, he is our brother who stands with us in every circumstance, who walks beside us on every mountain top and in every valley and will bring us safely home at the end. We stand in the strength and the power of the Lord because the living Lord stands with us.