

WELCOME TO THE MISSION FIELD
November 3, 2013 –Reformation Sunday/All Saints/ Memorials –2 Corinthians 5: 16-21
The Church of the Covenant

As you exit the Commons Area today there is a large, wonderful sign overhead, stating, *“You are Now Entering the Mission Field”*. Betty Lou Hickman-Engle gave it as a memorial gift in memory of her first husband, Bill Hickman, and in memory of her second husband, George Engle. I never had the privilege of meeting Bill (at least in this lifetime!) but I know and love George. I always remember him studying the Bible, indeed, as he was last in the hospital he was studying the gospel of John. So every Sunday when we come to church and are charged up by God, we are also charged by that sign, to go out and actually do something for God. We receive our charge by the Saints who have gone before us to go out into the world and make a difference for the Lord Jesus Christ. The mission field is in Haiti and Menaul, New Mexico and the mission field is all around us here in our own community. So...WELCOME TO THE MISSION FIELD!

Historically, the Presbyterian Church was the leading denomination on the face of the earth in sending out missionaries across the face of the earth. Presbyterian Missionaries went and preached and served and died in such far flung places as Ethiopia, and Egypt, and Cameroon, and India, and Kenya in Africa. I remember as a child giving pennies in the Mission Box during opening exercises for Sunday School to our missionaries, the Lorrimers, who served in Egypt. Back in the 1960's at the numerical height of the Presbyterian Church, we gave some 30% of every dollar we received away to mission. There were “dollar for dollar” Presbyterian Churches who spent one dollar on themselves and gave one dollar away. That total in our denomination as a whole fell to between 8-9% by 1990; that percentage total has continued to fall to this day. Another way of putting it is that Presbyterians who used to give away a third of everything they received now spend 95% of everything we receive on ourselves. Jesus says: *“Where our treasure is, there shall your heart be also”*. You know what the real priorities are in your life when you look at your checkbook, says Jesus. So over the past 50 years we have lost our heart for mission. We spend more and more on ourselves and less and less on the least, the last and the lost. Is it any wonder that the Presbyterian Church has declined numerically and spiritually over that same period of time? Why would God bless a group of people who spent everything on themselves?

The recapturing of our heart for mission is a key part of revivifying the Church of Jesus Christ!

By the way, that mission movement of which the Presbyterian Church was in the forefront, brought the Gospel throughout the world. Operation World, which keeps track of Christian statistics across the globe, reported that in 2007 for the first time in the history of the earth that Christians were more than 50% of the world population. And in 2007 for the first time in the history of the earth, Christians who live in the developing world, in China, in Asia, in Africa and in South America, are more than 50% of the world's CHRISTIAN POPULATION. Throughout most of history the percentage of Christians in the world hovered around 25-30%. But the mission movement of the 1800's and early 1900's moved that percentage to what we see today –explosive growth of the church of Jesus Christ in Africa, Asia and South America. There are more Presbyterians in Kenya today than there are in the United States. That's what the Presbyterian Church did. In Western PA what hospital didn't the Presbyterian Church found? Presbyterian and Allegheny General both founded by Presbyterian ministers to address the health concerns of the community. What college wasn't founded by the Presbyterians? W&J, Waynesburg, Westminster, Grove City, all founded by Presbyterian ministers seeking to have an educated populace. That's what a church that had a heart for mission was able to accomplish. People in our country came to Christ and came to worship and studied about Jesus, not just for their own benefit and to be

entertained, but rather in order to be sent out as missionaries into the world and to transform that world for Jesus' sake. As Presbyterians this is who we are; this is our identity; this is in our spiritual DNA.

I believe the reclamation of our heart for mission can and will be transformational not only for us, but also for our community and our world once again! Welcome to the Mission Field!

By the way, have you noticed that we live today surrounded by a foreign culture? The church is now set in an entirely secular setting. We are in the middle of a world that only vaguely believes in God, probably views the assertion of Jesus being the way, the truth and the life as "narrow", judgmental, or intolerant. We are surrounded by generational poverty, multiple generations of people whose culture has little to do with middle class Presbyterianism. We might as well be set in the middle of the developing world. By the way, anybody stop into Las Palmas Store over on Chestnut, grab a taco from the Taceria, heard more and more Spanish and other languages being spoken? That's changed just in the last 5 years. If we're not going out into the world anymore, beloved the world is coming to us. The city of Washington is a HUGE mission field. It is a mission field into which we have been placed by God for a high and noble purpose. Pastor Randy Boyer always noted that The Church of the Covenant is partially in the city of Washington and partially in the Borough of East Washington, literally serving as a bridge between the city and the suburbs. We've been placed by God right where we are for a purpose; we have a mission, an assignment from the Lord God Almighty. When we exit the doors of our church we ARE IN THE MISSION FIELD. Welcome to the Mission Field!

Our scripture is instructive. It begins by noting that, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5: 17) Change OUT THERE in the world, begins with change IN HERE, within our heart. When Christ comes in a new and powerful way into our life and into our heart, whether you were saved years ago, whether you are like I am a "Gradual Christian" who was raised in the church and never knew a time when I didn't believe, but now somehow has a new and powerful experience of the Lord Jesus Christ in our life. Its about moving us from where we are into a deeper more powerful relationship with Jesus. We begin to see the world as Jesus sees the world. Our heart breaks for the things that breaks the Master's heart. We are transformed by the renewal of our minds; our thinking about things changes. Our priorities change. What we thought was important becomes less; what we do with our lives in relation to our world in Jesus' name becomes more. Spiritual transformation is inherently missional. It moves us away from thinking that Jesus is there for my own little personal experience; he died so I might get a little jolt of encouragement every now and then; its only personal to me; its all about my personal relationship with Him only. Instead, of course, as our scripture says: *"Through Christ reconciled us to Himself"* but that was not the end and purpose of God sending Jesus into the world. No, it goes on to say, we were reconciled to God through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross in order to have a *"ministry of reconciliation"* (v. 18), in order to be bearers of Jesus' salvation and encouragement and betterment to our world. We were transformed by Jesus in order to make us into agents of transformation for His world. We worship Him in order to be sent out to serve. We study Him in order to find Him out there in the pressing need of the world. And then it concludes: *"So we are ambassadors for Christ."* (2 Corinthians 5: 20) We are the ones who are to take the heart of Jesus out into the world as HIS ambassadors. Think about it this way: God sent Jesus Christ into the world, HE sent His only begotten Son as a MISSIONARY to us, and then HE transformed us through the power of His love, in order to turn us into MISSIONARIES FOR OUR WORLD, ambassadors for Christ, missionaries who give our world the same thing Jesus has given us –the LOVE of GOD! So we are MISSIONARIES...ambassadors...for Christ. Welcome to the Mission Field!

As we receive communion today, we will be surrounded by a mighty cloud of witnesses. Hovering above the communion table are all those who have loved and served the Lord. Bill is here. George is here. Pastor Randy is here. All those Presbyterians and others who sacrificed their time and talent and treasure to make a difference for the Lord Jesus Christ, all of them are here with us, spiritually present reminders of who we are supposed to be, and what our world is supposed to look like. All those missionaries, of whom the world was not worthy, who went out and served and died and who lived for a Savior and a world that they hoped one day would be. As we receive the sacrament today, may we receive a double portion of the love of Jesus, and of the Spirit that propelled these faithful to transform the world in Jesus' name. And then as we exit today, look up and see the sign above your head, that says, *"You are Now Entering the Mission Field"*. Look up. It is a sign from Bill and from George, from Pastor Randy and from the Lord. Church of the Covenant, if I may say, it is a SIGN FROM GOD, of the new creations we are, and of the ambassadors and missionaries we are to be. Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*