**The Mission Station on K Street**

**Text: Philippians 2:4**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

**World Communion Sunday**

**October 1, 2017**

The late A. Dale Fiers, first General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), took a trip around the world in 1952. At that time Dr. Fiers was the President of the United Christian Missionary Society, and the purpose of his trip was to visit the many sites across the globe where the Disciples were engaged in missionary work. These were places where the good news of God’s love was being shared with folks who had never heard of Jesus. And that good news was being shared through preaching and teaching, through Bible Study and prayer. But also, through doctors and nurses, and building schools, and digging wells, and teaching farming techniques, and standing in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. In the book that he wrote about his travels, *This Is Missions*, he notes that he was especially touched by his visit to the Congo. There he was taken by boat up the Congo River, visiting the small mission stations along the river where ministry was happening: this ministry of sharing the Gospel; this ministry of serving God by serving the people of the Congo. He was moved by the great work that was being done, but he was moved as well by the joy with which he was received, and the incredibly warm hospitality that he was offered, at each and every one of those mission stations, as seasoned workers and new Christians alike tied-up the boat and helped him ashore, and they ate together and worshipped together and learned together.

Our church has been establishing mission stations around the world since 1850. Here in Indiana we have experienced some of the fruit of that labor through our nearly 10 year partnership with our Disciples brothers and sisters in the Mbandaka District in Congo. But on this World Communion Sunday we think not only of Congo, and not only of our own denomination, but of the Church throughout the whole world, coming together around the one Table of the Lord and celebrating our unity in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Fiers visited many mission stations in remote parts of the world. But you know, you don’t have to go to Africa or Asia to visit a mission station. *We* are a mission station. This *church* is a mission station. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and God’s love is shared: that is a mission station of the Church; a remote outpost of God’s Kingdom in a world that so desperately needs to experience the unconditional love of Jesus.

You see, the Church exists not for itself, but for others. That’s Paul’s point in his Letter to the Philippians, the 2nd chapter and the 4th verse, where he says, “Let each of you look not to your *own* interests, but to the interests of *others*.” And just in case we missed the point, Paul lifts-up the example of Jesus a few verses later. Jesus, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” The Church is a mission station. We are here to share the good news of God’s love with others; to serve God by serving others.

That makes Bedford-First Christian Church the mission station on K Street. We begin by serving those right on our doorstep, and move out from there to serving the whole world. Jesus said that he came into the world “not to be served, but to serve (Mk 10:45). He said, “Go into all the world and make disciples” (Mt. 28:19). He didn’t say, “Wait for them to come to you.” No, he said, “Go!” The Church is a mission station. It is the place from which God’s people are deployed to serve their neighborhood, and their city, and their region, and the whole world.

This contrasts with what is perhaps a more common image of the church: a place where you go to get recharged. Or a place where you go to get refilled. The idea is that life is so hard and we get so drained that we have to come to church to get charged-up. And the image is not without merit. Sometimes life *is* hard; and we *do* need to get recharged. But if you push the image too far, it starts to sound like it’s all about you. “I need to get recharged; I need to get refilled; I need this; I need that; *I* expect such and such from *my* church.” The church as a filling station? Well, maybe a little bit, but the last time I checked there weren’t any gas pumps out front. The church is not a filling station, but a mission station! We are here on this corner to *serve*!

And, of course, we know this. We’re one of the top churches in the Region in terms of mission giving, our Coat Bank is an important mission to this community each fall, we will be taking up an offering at our Fellowship Meal today for our mission partners in Congo, and I could go on and on. So to some degree I’m preaching to the choir. But even the choir needs to get tuned up each week. Am I right, Christa? I hear you all each Sunday morning going, “Hm, hm, hm, hm, hm, hm, hm.”

And if we’re going to be a well-tuned mission station, then we have to know our community. Because even a mission-oriented congregation can lose track of its mission field. We have to know our community. From time to time we have to check our ideas about our mission against reality, so that we’re serving our community as it is today; not some faded photograph of the community as it was years ago. Periodically you have to look anew at your mission field, and sometimes it takes a fresh pair of eyes to help you do that. Because, you know, if you’ve been looking at something for a while, you tend to keep seeing the same thing, even if it’s no longer there! Like one time when I overheard my dad describing my brother to someone; my brother Tom who’d had very blond hair when as a kid but at 15 his hair was quite brown and yet here’s my dad talking about how Tom has blond hair. I was 10 years old and I’m thinking, “Um, Dad, I think you’d better look again!” If you’ve been looking at something for a while, you tend to keep seeing the same thing, even when the landscape has changed. Sometimes we need a fresh pair of eyes – a more objective pair of eyes – to look at our mission field. Which is one reason why the Church Board is considering working with a Disciples organization called Hope Partnership to help us look at ourselves and our community and discern the mission that God has set before us today. We have to know our mission fieldas it really is today.

If we’re going to be a well-tuned mission station, we have to know our community. And, we have to be united. We have to be united around a clear sense of what our mission is. Paul says to look to the interests of others and also, to be of one mind. That doesn’t mean that you have to agree on everything, but it does mean that everyone is focused in the same general direction. If you’ve got one group going off in this direction, and another group in that direction and a third group doing something else over here, and all 3 groups are competing for the same resources, it gets in the way of your mission. A faithful mission station has a *common* mission, and it pauses from time to time to look around and discern what that mission is.

Like Wilkinsburg Christian Church in Pittsburgh. Once a strong congregation in a big, impressive building, it had shriveled down to 45 members who couldn’t keep up their building, who didn’t have a sense of mission, who seemed to be slowly dying. But then they took a fresh look at their community. They talked with their neighbors. They discovered groups and organizations who viewed that same neighborhood as a mission field. And they began to form partnerships: sharing their building with others and engaging in mission together. They reached out way beyond their walls. And now, 25 years later, they still have only about 45 members; but they’re united in a common vision for mission, they’re a vital, thriving congregation, and they’ve been transformed.

The Church is a mission station! And to be engaged in Christ’s mission is what Christianity is all about. Someone might say that “I’m a Christian because I go to church every once and a while.” Well, of course, it’s good to go to church, but there’s a whole lot more to being a Christian than just sitting in worship. I mean, sitting in church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage will make you a car. No, Paul says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,” who took the form of a *servant*. And a servant is engaged in the mission of his or her master. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. And Jesus has said to the Church, for 2,000 years now, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). Amen.