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**Changing Course**

Luke 10:1

It was a fearful time for the followers of Jesus. Their Lord had set his face to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not a safe place for Jesus to visit. Those who had Jesus' ear probably urged him not to go there. But Jesus would not be dissuaded from making this dangerous journey.

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus picked seventy followers to go ahead as his emissaries. They were to go out in twos to those places where Jesus would arrive later and announce his coming. This was a practice that was common among the most important people of that time. The emissary was to prepare the way and announce the arrival of his employer. It was a truly important person who could send out 35 pairs of emissaries. This probably seemed like an unnecessarily dangerous tactic to the disciples. The use of public emissaries made it easy for the authorities in Jerusalem to track Jesus' movements and to know where he was going before he arrived.

But when Jesus began issuing instructions to his emissaries, their fear for Jesus' safety gave way to an even greater fear for their own well-being. They were to travel light. They were not to carry food, clothing, money, or provisions of any kind. They were to depend completely on the generosity of the strangers they met along the way. They were being sent as emissaries, but they were not appropriately equipped for the job. They would be like lambs in the midst of wolves. It's a miracle that any of them went.

Luke's story breaks off with the sending of the seventy emissaries and picks up again with their return. In a sense, these become two different stories because the tone of the return is so different. These anxiety ridden disciples who went out to do a job they were not equipped to do come back in a completely different frame of mind. They are flushed with the success of their mission. They joyfully report that they have overcome even the most impossible of obstacles. A careful reading of these stories leaves us asking, "What's going on here? Are these the same emissaries who were sent out like lambs in the midst of wolves? What happened to these people in the course of their journey?"

I have been asking a similar question over the past five years about one of my family lines. This family was established in the Carolinas by 1745. They were soon fully assimilated into the Scots Irish culture of the Carolina Piedmont. They had fifteen children in the family and they were back country Baptists. I had been warned some years ago that anyone who digs into family history long enough will turn up a few horse thieves and cattle rustlers. But no one warned me that I might find Baptists.

About five years ago I learned that some family researchers were trying to connect this family with a family of the same name which arrived in Virginia a century earlier. The Virginia family had large land grants in the tidewater plantation region. They were part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Virginia aristocracy. One of them was elected to the House of Burgesses which clearly marks them as part of the colonial elite. Like other tidewater planters they had small families and were at least nominally

members of the state supported Anglican church. I have continued to be very skeptical of efforts to link these two families. Their profiles are radically different. They represent very divergent stories.

Several weeks ago, I discovered that I was wrong. There is evidence strong enough to connect these families. But it still left me with the question of what happened to bring about such a dramatic change of course. What made these aristocratic Virginians sell their plantation and give up their genteel existence to become back country Baptists in the Carolinas? The recent discovery of information about another family that married into this line in South Carolina provided a tantalizing clue. This was a New England family which came to America in the first wave of the Puritan migration to Massachusetts. Then in the 1740s they were caught up in the Great Awakening which was sweeping the colonies. This was a great religious movement which transformed the fortunes of the churches which until then were attracting fewer than 20% of the population of the colonies. This New England family became Baptists and were no longer accepted by their friends and relatives in Massachusetts. So they moved to the Carolinas where they were instrumental in creating the Southern Baptist Church. Then I realized that something like this must have happened to the family which left Virginia. When they went to South Carolina they were organizing Baptist churches too. The unforeseen activity of God had dramatically changed the stories of these families. They had undergone a profound change of course.

That is what Jesus' disciples experienced on their journey. The missing link which brings together the two stories we find in Luke is the unforeseen activity of God. It is the link which gives shape to our journeys too.