

Dr. Bruce Corley
Carroll Convocation Sermon
May 22, 2013

OTHER PLACES WITH JESUS
(Mark 1:35-39 NIV)

35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. **36** Simon and his companions went to look for him, **37** and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” **38** Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” **39** So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Can you imagine a preacher leaving town just when the meeting catches fire? Everyone, including his own team, is asking the question: “Where is he?” Here for the first time we meet a recurrent theme of the gospel, that of the difference between Jesus’ view of the kingdom of God and the expectation his disciples (and still more that of the crowds in Capernaum). “While they would naturally pursue the normal human policy of taking advantage of popularity and building on success on their own home ground,” in the words of Dick France, “following Jesus will increasingly involve them in having to learn a new orientation” (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC, 111). The disciples will find it difficult to go to other places with Jesus, especially as his popularity wanes and the shadow of a cross darkens their pathway. Jesus knew what lay ahead, and he begins here to equip them for life in the kingdom far different than they expected.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* interview about college costs and online learning, Stanford University President John Hennessy said, “What I told my colleagues is there’s a tsunami coming. I can’t tell you exactly how it’s going to break, but my goal is to try to surf it, not to just stand there” (quoted by William G. Durden, “The Real Tsunami” [*Inside Higher Ed*, June 11, 2012]). I hope he has a big surfboard. And by the way, how will he practice?

Change is in the air, or should I say, in the water, a sea change. Arthur Levine, esteemed educator and observer of the changes underway says: “America is shifting from a national, analog, industrial economy to a global, digital, information economy. Our social institutions, colleges and universities included, were created for the former. Today they all seem to be broken. They work less well than they once did. Through either repair or replacement — more likely a combination — they need to be refitted for a new age” (“MOOCs, History and Context” [*Inside Higher Ed*, April 29, 2013]).

It’s very important to know the essential factors that hold things together. I borrow an example from the world of science. From the subatomic particles, to molecules, to people, to planets, and stars, to the outer edges of space, the entire cosmos—it’s all linked together by deep forces governed by just *six* numbers. As Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal and Research Professor at Cambridge, puts it: “These six numbers constitute a ‘recipe’ for a universe. Moreover, the outcome is sensitive to their values: if any one of them were to be ‘untuned’, there would be no stars and no life” (*Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* [1999], p. 4).

If Rees is right (and who is the doubter?), there are matters in this world that must be right on—no mistake, no guesswork—right at the center of existence. What are the governing

forces of our life in Christ, for the ministry, for the 21st century church? I have four numbers—deep forces that will keep us on track, sustain the journey, and get us to other places with Jesus.

1. Prayer in a solitary place

The Gospel of Mark impresses one with the relentless activity of Jesus. Mark's narrative has pace, it runs: 55 scene changes, little discourse, heavy activity (deeds of Jesus). The theme marker change or movement is Greek *euthys*, used 42 times and translated “at once,” “straightway,” “immediately,” and KJV “anon” (1x). We might gloss it as “rightaway.” The first use is of the Baptist: “make his paths straight” (1:3). So the meaning includes time and space, as in our “I had the rightaway” and “Yes dear, rightaway” (which for me is usually a delaying tactic). In Mark, this little word makes you feel tired, covering time and space.

The final scene is 16:7, Jesus goes ahead into Galilee—there they will see him alive; we have here the opening scene—a long day (followed by a longer day 3:20-5:43, and the longest day 14:1-15:47), beginning early on the Sabbath with a synagogue healing, then to Peter's home, where a crowd massed in Capernaum. Then incredibly Jesus retires, goes away to a deserted place. Why did he leave at the peak of the meeting?

First of all, to pray. Some suggest that Jesus prayed for our benefit only—a model for us to follow, not a necessity for him. After all, so the explanation goes, “He was God; he was talking to himself.” But then he prayed by himself. Three prayers in Mark occur at 1:35, 6:46 (5000 fed), and 14:32 (Gethsemane). He prayed alone to unburden his heart to the Father, to petition for help, to voice his obedience—a reverent submission. “During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (Heb. 5:7 NIV, NRSV).

Do not expect that the passing of time will give you more time and less activity. In the midst of your ‘busyness’ seek a solitary place to pray.

2. Urgency to preach the good news

“I must preach there...” Why is preaching so important? Because God has chosen by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. It is central in our architecture; it is central to the Christian faith. This preaching is not just talk; some preaching is nothing more than foolishness. I am referring to the “word of the cross,” God's contract to deal with sin based on the merits of Jesus Christ. Pulpit are filled with too much Baptist lite and Bible fluff, not enough power of God to save—in the gospel there is revealed a righteousness of God to save.

Are we devoted to everything else and not this? A small percentage of our students are preparing for the preaching ministry in the church. I perceive two dangers: the desire to be comfortable—folks don't like to hear about sin and forgiveness, and the leverage of being approved—the gospel has an edge that cuts against the culture. We also live in a country where Christianity is on the wane; established churches are in decline.

But other parts of the world have experienced renewal. The Pew Study of Global Christianity reports that in recent years, a number of scholarly studies (see Philip Jenkins, Robert Wuthnow, and Mark Noll) have discussed the rapid growth of Christianity in the developing countries of the “Global South” – especially Africa, Asia and Latin America – and debated whether the influence of Christians in the “Global North” is waning, or not. A century ago, the Global North (commonly defined as North America, Europe, Australia, Japan and New Zealand) contained more than four times as many Christians as the Global South (the rest of the world).

Today, the Pew Forum study finds, more than 1.3 billion Christians live in the Global South (61%), compared with about 860 million in the Global North (39%).

Seven-in-ten evangelical leaders who live in the Global South (71%) expect that five years from now the state of evangelicalism in their countries will be better than it is today. But a majority of evangelical leaders in the Global North expect that the state of evangelicalism in their countries will either stay about the same (21%) or worsen (33%) over the next five years.

In addition, most leaders in the Global South (58%) say that evangelical Christians are gaining influence on life in their countries. By contrast, most leaders in the Global North (66%) say that, in the societies in which they live, evangelicals are losing influence. U.S. evangelical leaders are especially downbeat about the prospects for evangelical Christianity in their society; 82% say evangelicals are losing influence in the United States today, while only 17% think evangelicals are gaining influence.

May I give you personal testimony that churches in the Global South gather thousands of worshippers Sunday by Sunday, the saving gospel is preached, and hundreds commit their lives to Christ. How strange, you say, to preach and give an invitation, then see people on the spot make public decisions. Why are these evangelicals so upbeat? Here's the secret—they are gospel enthusiasts; they share an urgency to preach the gospel.

3. A heart without boundaries

“Let us go somewhere else.” *The Gospel and Urbanization* (1985) describes the other places: In 1900 there were eleven cities in the world with one million+, by 2000 more than 500 million+ cities. Urban growth worldwide is more than 7% per year, doubling in a decade; every month a new Chicago and Los Angeles is being created (6 million people).

Most of the world's peoples live in the vast world cities. One of them is Istanbul, 15 million people, 20% of Turkey's population, 1/2 million growth each year, doubles every 12 years; 1000 new streets each year, 80 thousand new houses each year, 1.5 million cars—18,000 taxis! There are other places closer to home. Among 60,000 residents of an inner-city Chicago neighborhood, there are 50 nations of the world in an area little more than one square mile. These are other places where we have not gone: in the cities above 50,000 where 80% of the lost live, we have less than 20% our work force!

I grew up in a small town with a ‘division street’, one that really meant division. On the upper side of town were the whites, and on the lower side, the poor and Indians. So I grew up thinking that I lived on the right side of the street, because we had little to do with the lower side of town. Near the end of my father's life, he told me the truth, something I had wondered about in looking at the pictures of my grandparents. I was in fact 1/16th Indian. What a shock—all those years I looked down on Indians, and I found out I was one of them. I really belonged on the wrong side of the street but thought I was better than that. So it is with all of us; we tend to set boundaries that we will not cross. To follow Jesus requires a heart without boundaries.

4. Sense of calling (or being sent)

For Jesus, a conviction of having been sent lies at the center of his life plan: Mark 1:38, *eis touto gar exēlthon* is translated variously as “for therefore I came forth,” (KJV), “for that is why I came out” (RSV), “for that is what I came out for” (NASB), “because for that purpose I came forth” (Wey), “that is why I have come” (NIV), “that is what I came out to do” (NEB), “because that is why I came” (GNB). Many commentators take to phrase to mean “why I came out from Capernaum.” NIV and GNB see an allusion to the eternal mission of Jesus who was

sent from heaven. The parallel in Luke 4:43 is very instructive—“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also because that is why I was sent.” Luke reads *epi touto apestalēn*, the aorist passive, clearly interpreting the statement as the eternal mission of the Son.*

*Note that Nolland (WBC) demurs from Luke’s view, but Marshall (NIGTC) thinks that Luke has read Mark as the eternal mission. “But an instructed Christian reader is likely to see more in it than that, and the similar use of *ēlthon / ēlthen* in Jesus’ words in 2:17; 10:45 to express his essential mission suggests that Mark may have in mind already the concept of the ‘coming into the world’ of the preexistent Son of God (cf. 1:24?) which is such a prominent feature of the Fourth Gospel (for *exēlthon* in this sense cf. Jn. 8:42; 16:27-28). Luke 4:43 apparently takes it in this sense” (France, NIGTC, 113).

The Sending of Jesus by the Father

1. “In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4)
2. “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17)
3. “God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh ... condemned sin ...” (Rom. 8:3)
4. “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9)
5. “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for the many” (Mark 10:45)
6. “As the Father hath sent me, so send I you” (John 20:21)

There is no word “mission” in the NT—rather a ‘sending’, his and ours. All the words related to mission come from the root for ‘sending’. When Paul recounts the offer of salvation to all, he begins with calling upon the Lord and links it to believing, then to hearing, then to preaching, and finally to being sent: “How will they preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:14-15). My calling is his sending.

As a young college student, I grappled with a decision to enter the ministry, primarily because my father was opposed to it. One evening, after I had finished my work as a janitor, I returned to my dormitory room with tears and a distressed spirit. When I leaned down to open the door, the key on a chain around my neck fell to the floor. I went in and tossed it on my pillow, then noticed stamped on the key three numbers: 1, 10, 32. So, I turned to the first book of the New Testament, Matthew, chapter 10, verse 32 and began reading.

[I am not recommending the condemned practice called sortilege, using the random opening of the Bible for fortune telling, cf. Metzger, *Oxford Companion*. By the way, did you hear of the fellow seeking a word from the Lord who let his finger fall on the page of his open Bible and landed on “Chapter 11”?]

I read of the sending of twelve, then of a man who loves father... (vs. 37)—it made my decision and gave me a lifelong conviction. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” This passage in Matthew set my course—it has now been fifty three years since the Lord captured my heart. No one can enter or survive in ministry without the defining moment of being sent by the Lord.