

WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING?

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(Mark 1:14–20 NRSV) Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, {15} and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." {16} As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. {17} And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." {18} And immediately they left their nets and followed him. {19} As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. {20} Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Our text this morning is found in the beginning of Mark's Gospel. Two weeks ago we began the Gospel of Mark with the story of Jesus baptism — today we have the beginning of his Galilean ministry.

After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: "Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message."

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee's sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed.

Mark 1:14–20 The Message

And as he begins this ministry, what does he do?

He starts to assemble a team.

Entrepreneurs know that starting a business requires some help from their friends.

So what kind of friend is Jesus looking for?

Chef Duff Goldman, of the very popular show on the Food Network called the Ace of Cakes says, “After pastry school I decided to make cakes my way, so I set up shop and hired the most talented people I know, MY FRIENDS!”

So who are these friends?

Rich Mintzer of Entrepreneur magazine suggests that there are “four people every business owner needs.” Few people Mintzer suggests are fortunate to find all four — but if they do, they are especially blessed.

The four types of people, according to Mintzer, are:

- The Cheerleader

Cheerleaders are those who will rally behind an idea and provide encouragement, especially during the initial headaches of a business start-up.

- The Role Model

This is the “follow me and do as I do” person.

They are a mentor but they also could be someone close to you like a close friend or family member.

- The Expert

It’s always good to surround yourself with people who are smarter than you about certain areas. Experts provide the missing pieces — you may be gifted in one part of the business but need help and advice in another. Experts fill in the gaps by asking questions that begin with, “Have you given any thought to ...”

- The Techie

These are folks who are wizards with things: computers, communication systems, manufacturing, infrastructure and the like. I cannot imagine someone being successful in the world today without this type of person on their team.

There are certainly many others that are needed to help make a start-up venture successful — but the key that I want to get across is that it takes a TEAM to be truly successful.

And when we look at the example of Jesus — we find that he understood this.

Even he needed help from his friends.

In this week's gospel lesson, we see that Jesus is beginning an entrepreneurial venture, but he's not starting a "business," and he's not just some entrepreneur trying to make a buck. Jesus is not going to be your CEO to help you get rich. He's actually doing something a little bit more ambitious, like **PROCLAIMING THE ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD** (1:15).

In order to get this off the ground — Jesus gathered together a team.

Without a doubt — part of the idea in choosing 12 disciples was to provide a metaphor for a reconstituted and renewed 12 tribes of Israel.

But Jesus also fully understood that his mission required the help and participation of others.

Jesus doesn't wait for them to come to him but as he begins his ministry Jesus spends time going after candidates, most of whom are nothing like him.

If the call of the first disciples is any indication, Jesus wasn't following Mintzer's advice.

He wasn't looking for experts in religious discourse, cheerleaders who would be part of an entourage, role models of high moral character and religious piety or techies versed in communication theory and practice.

He doesn't go headhunting at the local synagogue or collect resumes from Jerusalem.

Instead, what does he do?

Jesus goes to the lakeshore reeking with the stink of fish, and begins by inviting some fishermen to be on his team.

The text gives us no indication of the specific roles Jesus was looking for in Simon, Andrew, James and John, but we can get a clue at least about the basic character of the disciples he was calling and, indeed, still calls today.

But before we go there, though, we have to remember that any entrepreneurial venture worth its salt begins with a solid mission statement.

What was Jesus mission statement?

Mark tells us quite clearly:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (1:15).

The time is now, God is here, change your ways and be believing the good

news.

A nice simple statement — BUT this announcement about the coming of God's kingdom would have been both exciting and full of danger to those who had gathered on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Exciting because:

it meant that God was ready to act decisively once again on Israel's behalf — just like God had done in leading the people out of Egypt or when they returned from the Babylonian captivity.

Dangerous because:

In order for this new kingdom to come to fruition the old kingdom had to come to an end and that meant a challenge to Roman rule and authority.

For many Jews living in the first century the call of the “kingdom of God” was a revolutionary call — a revolutionary slogan that called for violent revolt against Rome.

But, of course, that is not how Jesus understood God's kingdom.

For Jesus, the coming kingdom was a sign that God was going to do something on behalf of all of creation, redeeming God's people from their self absorption, making outsiders to be insiders and decisively defeating evil and death.

Pretty good news — but also something that required a response.

What Jesus comes looking for are friends who would be followers

A response seems to be what Jesus was looking for as he came to the lakeshore.

He was “fishing” for people when he came upon Simon and Andrew, and invited them to join him in his work.

James and John were next, leaving their undoubtedly astounded father by the boats with the hired help as they, too, set out after Jesus.

Traditionally, many readers of the gospels assume that these fishermen were poor, destitute individuals with nothing to lose who follow Jesus to try and break the monotony of their everyday lives.

But a close reading of Mark reveals quite a different scene.

The truth is that these four fishermen were likely quite prosperous.

We learn later that Simon and Andrew had a house and an extended family (Mark 1:29–31) and that James and John, along with their father Zebedee, were wealthy enough to be able to hire additional help for their fishing business.

These weren't desperate drifters with nothing to lose, but well-established businessmen in a culture where prosperity and family were everything.

Following Jesus, then, was no small disruption of their lives but a complete change of course. Throwing in with Jesus meant throwing out their security, their reputations and their livelihoods.

Was Jesus looking for a cheerleader, a role model, an expert and a technic?

The political and religious establishment would come to think of him as a radical subversive — an ideological terrorist.

But Jesus wasn't looking for a weapons expert, bomb-maker, P.R. person and so on.

Rather than looking for four specific role definitions, Jesus wanted people with just one primary qualification for discipleship: a willingness to follow, regardless of cost.

Sure, the disciples would take on different roles within the group as it formed around Jesus.

Simon Peter would become the leader, spokesman and conscience of the group.

John would be the “beloved” disciple and closest friend of Jesus,
Andrew may have been the hospitality coordinator
Judas the treasurer

Regardless of their roles — each disciple shared a common trait: They said “Yes” to Jesus' invitation, gambling their own futures on his vision for a new world.

It is pretty clear that they didn't exactly understand the ramifications at first.

Mark is pretty hard on the disciples, who seem to be a bit slow on the uptake at times when trying to grasp what Jesus was teaching them.

The courage that they displayed that day on the lakeshore would dissolve into

panic in the Garden of Gethsemane, yet they would be recovered by the resurrection and would move the kingdom message out into the world, a move that would cost most of them their lives.

Imagine Jesus walking into an office building, a factory or a grocery store and tapping a secretary, a welder or a checkout clerk on the shoulder saying, “Follow me.” Imagine the looks on the faces of his coworkers when the employee walks out, leaving the files open, the doors of a new car un-welded and the groceries un-bagged.

We have a hard time fathoming that kind of response and would probably chalk it up to some kind of cultlike mind control on the part of the spiritual guru making the call.

We like the idea of religious devotion to a cause, but only insofar as it doesn’t get in the way of our “normal” lives.

But sorry folks — the truth is — Jesus will disrupt our lives

Too often we miss that fact that Jesus is all about disrupting our normal lives.

The announcement of the kingdom was a proclamation that everything was changing.

Later, these same disciples would be accused of “turning the world upside down” through their preaching and activity in the name of Jesus (Acts 17:6).

Being a disciple means being willing to drop our own agendas for life and get on board with the kingdom agenda of Jesus.

We’re not called to simply be advisers and supporters of Jesus, but true “friends” and investors who stake our lives and livelihoods on his vision for the world (John 15:14).

Whatever job we’re working at, Jesus challenges us to see our primary vocation as being kingdom people, spiritual entrepreneurs who are fully invested — body, mind, spirit, wallet, time — in that venture!