

# With A Little Help From My Friends

Mark 1:14-20 | 1/21/2017

When the Beatles sang “With a Little Help From My Friends” back in the 1960s, they were expressing a concept that applies not only to social relationships but to business ventures, too.

Rich Mintzer of *Entrepreneur* magazine offers a description of the “four people every business owner needs.” These are the “four types of supporters who serve as emotional backers and/or advisers. If you are fortunate enough to find all four, you may have your own little village to help you raise a business.” The four types, according to Mintzer, are:

- **The Cheerleader:** “Athletes have them,” says Mintzer, “so why shouldn’t you? Cheerleaders are those who will rally behind an idea and provide encouragement, especially during the initial headaches of a business start-up.” You’ll notice the word courage is in encouragement, which is also something very important that a cheerleader helps you develop.
- **The Role Model:** This is the “follow me and do as I do” person. Watch this person, take mentoring from him or her, and you begin to see important principles at work. A role model could be a teacher or mentor, but it could also be someone close to you, including family.
- **The Expert:** It’s always good to surround yourself with people who are smarter than you about certain areas. Experts provide the missing pieces for entrepreneurs who 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. Someone with the ability to provide efficient and timely technical support and advice can be a godsend in today’s business world.

While there may be other types of supporters needed in a start-up venture, *the point is that it takes a team to really be successful. And since Jesus — Son of the living God, God of God — believed this to be true, we’d better believe it, too.* In this week’s gospel lesson, we see that Jesus is beginning an entrepreneurial venture, but he’s not just some entrepreneur trying to make a buck. He’s actually doing something a little bit more ambitious, like PROCLAIMING THE ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1:15).

Jesus *surrounded himself with a team.* He doesn’t wait for them to come to him, but at the outset of his ministry spends time going after partners in ministry, most of whom are nothing like himself.

If the call of the first disciples is any indication, Jesus wasn’t looking for experts in religious discourse, cheerleaders who would be part of an entourage, role models of high religious piety or techies versed in communication theory and practice. He doesn’t go headhunting at the local synagogue.

Instead, he goes to the lakeshore and begins by inviting some fishermen to be on his team. While the text gives us no indication of the specific roles Jesus was looking for in Simon, Andrew, James and John, we can get a clue at least about the basic character of the disciples he was calling and, indeed, still calls today.

Before we go there, though, we have to remember that any entrepreneurial venture worth its salt *begins with a solid mission statement.* Here it is: “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 and believe the good news.

The announcement of the kingdom would have sounded both exciting and dangerous to those hearing Jesus by the Galilean lake. It was exciting because it meant that God was going to act decisively on Israel’s behalf.

It was dangerous because that meant a challenge to the prevailing Roman authority. In fact, for many first-century Jews, “kingdom of God” was a revolutionary slogan that presaged violent revolt against Roman power. Jesus, however, would use that slogan quite differently. Indeed, 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 sin, making outsiders to be insiders and decisively defeating evil and death. That was the “good news” that required a response.

A response seems to be what Jesus was looking for as he came to the lakeshore. He was doing his own “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 father by the boats with the hired help as they, too, set out after Jesus.

Many readers of the gospels assume that these fishermen were poor, destitute individuals with nothing to lose. 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.

Jesus wasn’t 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, keeping track of loaves and fishes. Regardless of his role, however, each disciple shared a common trait: They said “Yes” to Jesus’ invitation, gambling their own futures on his vision for a new world.

Mind you, 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 return after the resurrection and would move the Gospel 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 Penske file open, the doors of a new car un-welded and the groceries un-bagged. We have a hard time understanding that kind of response and would probably chalk it up to some kind of cult-like 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 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, and that includes being retired, Jesus challenges us *to see our primary vocation as being kingdom people, spiritual entrepreneurs who are fully invested* — body, mind, spirit, wallet, time — in his Gospel mission! The time is now, God is here, repent and believe the Good News!

*Pastor Keith*