

# **Amateur Helpers Needed**

**Third Sunday after Epiphany**

**Mark 1:14-20**

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Community of joy Lutheran Church

Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

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I. One would have to have been living in a cave these past nine months to not be aware of the primary race in our country.

A. As a matter of fact, one of the candidates has actually been running for a couple of years now. I only mention this because I want us to think about how these candidates put together their team. They have a goal to put their platform (their thoughts, feelings, and ideas) “out there” - so the voting public will have an opportunity to know who they are and what they stand for. They try to present a goal and then tell the people that they are the best person to get the country to that goal. Generally, these candidates want their close, personal staff to be knowledgeable, professional people - schooled (at least to some degree) in knowing how to run a winning campaign. It's highly unlikely that any candidate would go - let's say to the wharf - and pick a few fishermen, and then say, “Follow me. I want you to lead my campaign to win the hearts and minds of the people of this nation.” Those fishermen would not be considered

professional political consultants - would they? The only thing they are “pros” at is fishing.

B. Let’s switch gears and talk about this man named Jesus of Nazareth. We are told that he was sent to earth to usher in the kingdom of God. Now, I know it’s a big deal to become president of the United States, but (and maybe some would argue this point) I believe that ushering in the kingdom of God is an even bigger task than being president of this (or any) country.

Therefore, wouldn’t we think that this Jesus would be looking for some experienced, professional religious and societal leaders to be an integral part of his closest team? Wouldn’t he want to be surrounded by the best and the brightest? So, how does the story go in regard to the manner in which Jesus chose his “staff?” The text from Mark says it this way, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news.’ 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. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people’” (Mark 1:14-17). Oh yes, that’s right. Jesus went to the “docks” and chose some fishermen to be part of his closest circle of advisors and workers. It is, as if, he put out a sign which read: “Amateur Helpers Needed.” Jesus is starting - what Christian folks would say is the most important “campaign” in history, and yet he enlists the help of amateurs. Let’s look at his chosen

twelve. None of them were noted scholars. None of them were ultra wealthy business people. None of them were religious leaders of the time. None of them were (seemingly) powerful in any way. Okay, but some might think - he may not have the most eloquent and intelligent group on his staff - but I'm sure he will meet with the leaders of society and discuss with them his plans and goals. Not so much. He met with (he hung out with- mostly) the folks who were on the fringes of the society of that time. Jesus was almost always around the poor, the homeless, the prostitutes, and the really sick people. The crowds that normally surrounded him were not the best and the brightest of the society of that day. Today we might say that he wouldn't be at St. Peter's Cathedral, but instead he would be at the bus station in downtown Chicago. How would that go over in a campaign today? The newspaper headline might read: "Candidate so-and-so held a town-hall-style meeting in the bus station in Charlotte, North Carolina today." I don't think that would be considered very wise in our time. But, Jesus didn't live on earth in our time, and he certainly was not your average "Joe" - (or anything like any candidate we have ever had in any country on earth). Jesus was (and still is) different. He was sent to earth by God the Father to begin to usher in the kingdom of God by proclaiming the good news of God. Jesus could best be described using two words that many today might find disturbing. Jesus was revolutionary and radical! Whoa! Not so fast - some of you might say! Those are some pretty inflammatory words. Well, let's look at their

definitions. Revolutionary means “characterized by or resulting in a radical change.” Jesus called upon people to “repent.” That word literally means to “turn around.” Turning around and going the other way is certainly a “radical change” in one’s life. So, it does seem that Jesus and his message were revolutionary. It was also radical - which means: “departing markedly from the usual or customary; sometimes extreme.” Oh yes, we could often say that Jesus departs markedly from the usual or customary way of doing or saying things. His manner of choosing the disciples was certainly not customary - it was, in fact - extreme! And this radical and revolutionary Jesus carries those traits over to us - when he realizes that we are not professional evangelists, and yet he says to us (as he said to Andrew, Peter, James, and John), “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” That “call” is as clear for us today as it was to those disciples by the Sea of Galilee. We are the “amateur helpers” that Jesus needs to further the kingdom of God today. As strange as it seems, Jesus accomplishes his mission by calling ordinary folk to follow him and participate in this revolution called the kingdom of God. As disciples, we need reminders of the peculiar way in which Jesus invests great faith in us even as we have great faith in him.

C. However, it’s not always easy being a disciple of Jesus, but, if you know your scriptures, you realize that Jesus never told us it would be easy. As a matter of fact, he often told his disciples and other followers that it would most likely often be quite hard. He told them that they might be derided, run out of town, and

maybe even persecuted. We don't have to worry so much about being persecuted for our devotion to Jesus, but we do need to realize that all of the seeds that we sow may not grow and bear fruit. Jesus would tell us, "Plant the seeds anyway." We are to do the planting and God will take care of the growth. And, we should also try to not get too disappointed when our efforts seem to be inconsequential. We might hear that text from Mark for today and say, "How in the world could those fishermen just hear this man say 'Follow me,' and then drop everything and follow him?" Well, there may be more to it than we think. First, we must realize that the Bible does not tell us every action and word of Jesus and the disciples - so there could have been many things that happened that we just have not been told about. Secondly, we get the feeling that these four disciples didn't know anything about Jesus when he came by their boats. That probably is not true. In reality, Simon (Peter) and Andrew may have known Jesus (or known about Jesus) before this incident. In fact, that's what the first chapter of John's gospel suggests. There, Andrew is a disciple of John the Baptist who becomes a follower of Jesus and then brings his brother to meet Jesus. But Mark doesn't tell us anything about that. He's trying to make the point that Peter, and the others, follow Jesus simply because ... he's Jesus! So, it may be that Peter and Andrew knew about Jesus, and they had told James and John as well. Jesus coming by their boats was just the time in which he "officially" asked them to follow him. So, as it says in Mark, "And immediately they left their nets and followed

him.” We are not told that these people had any special training in discipleship, or that they had any particular natural gifts for following Jesus. Nevertheless, they stumble after him and the kingdom of God gets going. Exactly the same things could be said for us. We don’t have any special training in discipleship, but we “stumble” after Jesus and we trust that the kingdom of God continues to “get going.” We simply plant the seeds of faith and trust that with God all things are possible. It may even be possible that we folk - the people of Community of Joy Lutheran Church - are being faithful to our call. That call invites us to a new life. We have been included in the Kingdom. We have been told that we are needed. We have been chosen - we are called. We must realize that this call may be a summons to be different, to act differently, to often march to a different drummer, to travel a new and different direction, to live for others, to give life away, to put on the line our energy, our time, our resources, and to love our neighbors and our Lord. Here’s what we can expect as followers: adventure, surprise, challenge, and through it all, life - real life - the kind Jesus wants for each of us. Jesus put out the call for amateurs, and we answered that call - that’s why we are here today. So, let’s go out into the world and do the work for which we were called. We are to “catch” people for God. We are called to sow the seeds of love, grace, mercy, and peace. We are the amateur helpers Jesus needed. Thanks be to God. Amen.