

Who's the smartest person in the world? Any ideas? Well you could make a case for Ken Jennings. He's a guy who has won 74 consecutive matches on *Jeopardy* and took home more than \$2,500,000. You may be tempted to nominate Sheldon Cooper, the renowned physicist featured on *The Big Bang Theory* and its spinoff Young Sheldon. True, he is smart. But he's a fictional character. How about Garry Kasparov? His name is often brought up in discussions about smarts. He's the famous Russian chess player who, at the age of 22, became the world's youngest undisputed chess champion. Critics, however, are quick to point out, that Kasparov was later beaten at chess by an IBM computer. So who gets your vote?

If you find it hard to come up with a candidate for the "World's Smartest Person," Dr. Jason Betts can help you out. He's developed the *World Genius Directory*, which he argues has the definitive ranking of the world's top minds. While other lists exist, Betts claims that his is the only one without a bias, allowing anyone in the world who thinks, he or she, might be among the smartest of the smart to submit, his or her, scores. And according to the *World Genius Directory*, the smartest person in the world is a 36-year-old Greek psychologist, Dr. Evangelos Katsioulis. His IQ score is 198. To put that into perspective, his score is 30 points higher than the ranking of "genius," and almost double the score of your average human.

The bottom line is that, no matter how you rank them, or whether or not you can name them, there are some incredibly smart people in this world. There always have been. In fact, if we go way back to Biblical times, particularly to the time frame of Mark's Gospel story this morning, we witness Jesus in recruitment mode, and I think we can all agree he was and is the smartest and wisest man ever. In our text today we observe him actively drafting members for his team, a team that he knows will eventually be given the daunting task of igniting a spiritual movement

that will spread around the globe and endure for millennia. If you were Jesus, who would you pick to be members of this elite team?

If you were the Son of God, building a cohort of spiritual ninjas, wouldn't you choose the best of the best, the smartest of the smart? Wouldn't you hit up the *World Genius Directory*, find the biggest brain in Palestine, and recruit them to be in charge of logistics? Perhaps you'd round out the team by finding the funniest guy you could, someone who could keep the tone light when ministry got hard, as well as the strongest dude in town for when ministry got dangerous? That's how most of us would build our crews right? That's how we might assume Jesus would have gone about building his.

Instead, who does Jesus choose? *He chooses the unqualified.* You may think it harsh to label Simon and Andrew, James and John as unqualified, but it's not. The details given to us by St. Mark make this point clear. These are young men. In a world where the life expectancy was low. James and John were old enough to be established in a trade, but still young enough to have their father, Zebedee, in the boat with them. In first-century Palestine, the ideal career for most young Hebrews was *not* to be taking over the family business, but to be under the tutelage of a rabbi.

The brightest of boys, those who had shined in Hebrew school, and who stood out in their memorization of the Torah, would, upon completion, seek a rabbi, and, if they made the cut, they would spend the next few years tagging along as their disciples. So to be a young man, already embedded in the family trade, meant that, in all likelihood, you were not the cream of the crop in Hebrew school, and you did *not* have what it takes to run with the rabbis.

They were the leftovers, the kids who didn't get picked for kickball. Jesus didn't cherry-pick the brightest kids from other rabbis and build a dream team. He didn't even take the normal route and allow the best and brightest to choose him.

Instead, Jesus went on a mission looking for the leftovers, seeking out the underdogs, and he drafted *them*.

So Why? Why would Jesus forsake the genius list and deliberately pursue those who belonged at the bottom of the list? The answer is this: Jesus chose simple and unaccomplished disciples to follow him so that the love of God, and the work of His kingdom, would be undeniably evident to an unbelieving world. In other words, these simple and unschooled tradesmen would become living, breathing object lessons on the depths of God's grace and the scope of God's power. No one would be able to say that they were privileged to walk with Jesus because of their résumés. No one would be able to say that the growth of the Lord's kingdom could be credited to their IQ. It was all God.

So take the post-resurrection events of Acts 4. We're with these same disciples, give or take. Given the keys to the mission by the resurrected Christ, these former fishermen are now boldly championing the expansion of God's kingdom. Brought before the Jerusalem council, they passionately and effectively proclaim the gospel. The Jewish authorities are blown away -- not just by the content of their message -- but by the messengers themselves. Luke writes, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and *perceived that they were uneducated, common men*, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." The earthshaking news of the gospel being delivered through such unexpected vessels elicited an even greater awe of God and even clearer evidence of Jesus' power.

So why do you think God chose you? Is it because you are good with money? Is it because you are a techno wizard? Is it because you can solve problems and are quick on your feet? Ultimately you have been chosen because God loves you, and wants to know you. But is there anything in you, or about you, that made God want to love you? Perhaps it's your IQ. Your mom has always said

you were smart. Maybe it's your keen sense of style. God thought you could make God look good. Or maybe it was the fact that you're a type-A go-getter, and God wants a high-functioning, action-oriented winner on the team.

Did God call you to Christ through his Word, and draw you to the waters of baptism, marking you as his own and placing every promise of the cross upon your life, because God saw something awesome in you? Not necessarily. God called us to Christ for the same reason he called those original twelve disciples: because we make an excellent object lesson on the depths of God's grace and the scope of God's power.

Let's face it, we all have the capacity to possess a rebellious heart. And it isn't hard to imagine that some of us may have certain vices, or depravities, that we secretly struggle with. Not to mention that fact that there are times when we all wrestle with doubts or even our faults. Like John the Baptist a few weeks ago, we may occasionally feel that deep down we are not worthy to untie the straps of God's sandals, let alone be called one of God's beloved children. And yet, the good news is that God chose us so that the world might look at us and see that God is indescribably merciful, and incredibly powerful.

Ok.... so we can proclaim the truth that God has chosen us completely out of mercy all day long (and we should), but what's the action step? How does this truth get lived out in our lives? The answer is found in the actions of the disciples. What do we see them doing the moment after Jesus comes and taps them on the shoulder? What do we see them doing when a rabbi comes and makes it clear that he actually wants and has chosen them?

They dropped everything and followed. They dropped their nets. James and John literally left their dad and their boat behind! Why? Because when something you don't deserve but desperately want comes knocking at your door, you don't tell it to wait five minutes. You answer that door as fast as you can. We're all disciples.

We've each been given something we don't deserve, but desperately need: an encounter with Christ. And our task each day is to see this life with Jesus as an undeserved invitation. It's an undeserved invitation to drop our plans and follow him wherever he leads, knowing and trusting that wherever he takes us is better and more beautiful than whatever else we have planned.

So when Jesus calls you to love your annoying neighbor tomorrow morning, see it as a gift of grace, and a chance for God's power to shine through you. When Jesus calls you to invite a coworker to check out our online zoom church service, it's a gift of grace and a chance for God's power to shine through your vulnerability, since typically you're not comfortable with that kind of thing. When Jesus calls you to follow him into illness, to endure a burden, or to cope with the loss of a loved one, it too, is a gift of grace and a chance for God's power to shine in your moment of need or weakness.

Every day there is an opportunity, as a disciple, for the world to watch in astonishment as ordinary, unschooled, undeserving people live as examples of God's mercy and proof of God's power. God didn't have to choose us, but God has chosen us. God doesn't have to use us, but God uses us anyway. And the end result is not just a blessing for us, and those God calls us to serve. The end result is glory for God's name.

So...who is the smartest person in the world? Sure, the *World Genius Directory* claims to have an answer for you. But that's only if you define the word "smart" in terms of puzzle solving and IQ scores. Maybe what makes one smart isn't the ability to give the right answer. Maybe what makes us smart is our ability to recognize a good thing when it comes our way. After all, plenty of "smart" people have passed on Jesus. But not, James and John. Not Simon and Andrew. They got picked and then they gave up everything else to follow Jesus. Sure, they

may have been the leftovers, or underdogs, but the Lord's decision to choose them and us was and is pure genius. Amen.