

Jesus Chooses His Disciples - and They're Not Geniuses! *Mark 1:14-20* 1/25/2015

Who's the smartest person in the world? You could make a case for Ken Jennings. He's the guy who won 74 consecutive matches on *Jeopardy!* and took home more than \$2,500,000. Garry Kasparov is a name that's 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.

If you find it hard to come up with a candidate for "World's Smartest Person," Dr. Jason Betts can help you out. He's developed the *World Genius Directory*. And according to the *World Genius Directory*, the smartest person in the world is Dr. Evangelos Katsioulis, a 36-year-old Greek psychologist. His IQ score is 198. To put that into perspective, his score is 30 points higher than the ranking of "genius," almost double the score of your average human, and 23 points higher than Ken Jennings' paltry 175. Take that, *Jeopardy!* boy.

The bottom line is that there are some incredibly smart people in this world. There always have been. And imagine how helpful it'd be to have a chorus of crazy-smart people at your disposal, say when it's time to plan your budget, when the kids seem uncontrollable, or when something at work has got you stumped..

In today's reading from Mark's gospel we see Jesus in recruitment mode. He's actively drafting members of 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, wouldn't you choose the best of the best, the smartest of the smart? Wouldn't you find the biggest brain in Palestine and recruit him to be in charge of logistics? Perhaps you'd try to find the funniest guy you could, someone who could keep the tone light when ministry got hard. Maybe the strongest dude in town for when ministry got dangerous? That's how most of us would build our crew. 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 Mark make this point clear. 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 seek the best rabbi they could find and, if they made the cut, spend the next few years tagging along as 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 also-rans and he drafted *them*.

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 power and love of God would be evident in an unbelieving world. 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 kingdom could be credited to their IQ. It was all God.

So take the post-resurrection events of Acts 4. 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" (Acts 4:13, emphasis added). The earthshaking news of the gospel being delivered through such improbable messengers elicited a greater awe of God and clearer evidence of Jesus' power.

Why do you think God chose me? The first time I said I was going to be a pastor I was 5 years old. Smart for my age, maybe, but I really didn't know much of anything about being a disciple, let alone a pastor. And why stick with me as I turned into a "long-haired hippy freak" who spent most of his youth trying to escape the call and become something else – teacher, carpenter, actor – almost anything else?

No. I think God called me to Christ for the same reason he called those original 12 disciples: because I make an excellent object lesson on the depths of God's grace and the scope of God's power. God chose me so that the world might look at me and see that God is indescribably merciful and incredibly powerful.

What about you? *Why do you think God chose you?* Because you are the smartest, the kindest, the most generous, the strongest or the most faithful? Or maybe to show how "ordinary people", with all their flaws, can be empowered by God's grace to proclaim God's gospel?

That said, the question that you may be asking at this point is, "So what?" 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? They dropped everything and followed. They dropped their nets. James and John left their dad! Why? Because when something you don't deserve but desperately need 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 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 had planned.

So when Jesus calls me tomorrow morning to love my annoying neighbor, I see it as a chance for God's power to shine through my weakness. After all, I'm not the best at loving unlovable people. When Jesus calls you to invite a coworker to church, it's a chance for God's power to shine through your weakness, since you might not be comfortable with that kind of thing. When Jesus calls us to follow him into illness or endure a burden, it, too, is a chance for God's power to shine in our weakness. It isn't easy to believe in God's goodness and the triumph of Christ when chemo is pumping through your veins or when you have lost a loved one in spite of the best medical science can offer. Every day there is an opportunity 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 blessing for us and those God calls us to serve. The end result is glory for God's name.

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 "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 you smart is your ability to recognize a good thing when it comes your way. 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. Sure, they may have been the leftovers. But the decision to follow and serve Jesus was pure genius!

Pastor Keith