

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jan 13th 2018

The call of Saul by God to lead the Israelites, is a surprise – and presumably unlikely – because he comes from the least and smallest tribe of the Israelites. The call of Levi in the Gospel passage from Mark's Gospel appears to be even more shocking, even scandalous, because he is a tax collector and therefore of a "tribe" of notorious sinners, the tax collectors served the Roman Government.

In each case, by cultural acceptance, the call is unlikely, even impossible, because the men do not fit a social "profile" of a good candidate for a servant of God. Saul is a tall, good looking young man who is obeying his father by chasing after a small herd of donkeys that seem to have "escaped" the family farm. He has chased the donkeys over a couple of tribal areas (we might call them "counties" ) and hasn't tracked them down, so his serving man says "let's ask the holy man (seer) who hangs out in these hills. I have a little silver so we can pay him and he might give us a clue as to where to look for the donkeys." Meanwhile, God has his own little act in play to get ahold of this local "catch" and has warned the seer, Nathan to watch out for a man coming this way about mid-afternoon tomorrow. Then on the appointed day, God points Saul out to Nathan and says – "There he is, that's the man I was telling you about. Invite him to dinner and convince him he is now to be my servant, the king."

This is like a play, and we the audience know the outcome. We recognize that God has brought about this situation (even chased the donkeys off the farm?) to get his Will accomplished – and the human players in the scene must discern what it is that God is planning.

In the Gospel, Jesus walks along and sees the tax collector – the least likely candidate to be a competent disciple according to custom and attitude of the time. Jesus sees in Levi the very follower he needs and asks him to drop what he is doing and come follow. I can imagine that as Levi looked into Jesus' face in astonishment that a Jewish man was speaking to him in such an invitational way. Somehow, he saw something in Jesus' look that changed his entire life. Did his heart seem to stop for a moment? Did he somehow realize that all the hopes and dreams of all his years were met in this encounter? We don't know, but we can imagine. Most of us have come to moments in our lives when we experienced a crossroads. The fork in the road that promises happiness or ????

In the secular American culture, if we believe in God at all, it is hard for us to believe that God is profoundly interested in the ordinary activities of human beings; profoundly interested in a young man chasing his father's donkeys who have escaped their pen, or profoundly interested in the time and talent of a young man making his living by extorting money from his neighbors who pay taxes. Is it possible that God is profoundly interested in what I am doing today? In what you there at your computer are doing? In what we could be doing for the Kingdom today?

Is it possible that God is inviting, calling, cajoling us to come join HIS enterprise of saving the world? It is not only possible . . . it is the promise and fulfillment of all that is important about being human. Saul and Levi can help us see that as ordinary as we might be, God has great things in mind for us. Things far more important than any petty pursuit of our own. Let's go – it is a new year and a new opportunity to become what we were born to be. "This will be a sign for you, that the Lord has anointed you . . ."

# Eileen Burke-Sullivan-Creighton University's Mission and Ministry