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Vagabond: The Strange Gift of Broken People 1 Samuel 22:1-5

Have any of you read a book by Henri Nouwen? Nouwen is a great author with a really interesting story. He was a Catholic priest who spent many years teaching at Harvard with the academic elite. He had a growing influence and reputation as a top-notch scholar amongst the best and brightest. Everything seemed to be on track for a fabulous second half of his academic career until he decided to make a most peculiar move. Nouwen, chose to move to a small community in Canada for mentally disabled people called L'Arche to live with them and be their priest. He lived and worked there until his death in 1996.

Last month I read one of Nouwen's books with some friends and his story caused an interesting dialogue amongst us. Some opined that moving to L'Arche was a waste of his God-given gifts and talents and influence. Others argued that it wasn't a complete waste of time, but that it was certainly poor stewardship on his part. What do you think? Should the prominent professor from Harvard have moved to the tiny anonymous community of L'Arche? It seems like an unwise career move, but I'm so glad that he did it. Because it was amongst these marginal people that Nouwen truly found his authorial voice. I've never read a book that Nouwen wrote while at Harvard, but I've been deeply influenced by the books he wrote while at L'Arche. It seems that there was a strange gift from God found in relationship with the disabled and marginal people of L'Arche.

David was a man whose career was up and to the right, but we've been following his downward spiral these last few weeks in our sermon series called Vagabond. But at his lowest point, God gives David a strange gift of his own in the most unlikely of places. And if we can wrap our hearts and minds around what happened to David, I believe it'll change our perspective of our world, our work places, our neighborhoods, and even our church.

1 Samuel 22:1-5

¹David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. ²All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

³From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do

for me?" ⁴So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold.

⁵But the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

[Prayer of Illumination]

I think the opening line is leaving out a few details. "David left Gath" seems a bit too broad. Remember, he appeared before King Achish with the huge sword of Goliath strapped to his back and pretended to be crazy just to get out of there alive. I have a feeling that David more than "left Gath" I have a feeling it looked more like this: (video clip of guy getting kicked out of saloon through swinging doors).

David was the youngest son of Jesse. He was anointed as a boy by the prophet Samuel to be the future king of Israel. He was the only one among his older brothers, and the entire Israelite army, brave enough to fight Goliath. And with great trust in the Lord, David defeated the giant. He was the one who became a great captain for Israel, married to the King's daughter; befriended to the king's son. Everything was up and to the right for David. But in the midst of it all, King Saul's heart had turned against David. And now David was running for his life. He ran to Nob and lied to the priest; he ran to Gath then feigned insanity to save his skin. And when he got booted out of there he was on the run again.

So, where to this time? He escaped to the cave of Adullam. Now at first blush this may appear to be some random hole in the wall, but did you notice that it is called "**the** cave"? The cave of Adullam was probably not some random cavern in which David found refuge. It was more likely some sort of fortification in the wilderness, a refuge for people who were trying to escape the law or oppression. It was not a happy place.

So, here's David, the anointed one and proud captain with Goliath's sword seemingly still strapped to his back, hanging out with the down-and-out. He's alone, afraid ... lost. Do you know what that feels like? Listen to the pain in David's prayer from Psalm 142 – written from the cave. [*lights come down*]

¹ I cry aloud to the LORD;
I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.

² I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble.

³ When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.

In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.

⁴ Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.

I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.
⁵ I cry to you, LORD;
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."
⁶ Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.
⁷ Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.

Stick a fork in him; he's done. His game is over. He's hit the bottom. Surely God has forgotten him; his anointing has worn off ... right? That's what most of us think when we hit hard times; that's what most of us feel when things aren't going according to our plan. But God has NOT forgotten him. In fact, God has a blessing in store for him. Rather than surround him with a bunch of 'righteous people' as David desperately prayed, God surrounds him with a bunch of people whose lives are a mess ... just like David's.

Look at verse 2, "*All those who were in **distress** or in **debt** or **discontented** gathered around him.*" That's the kind of people who were hanging out in Adullam. These weren't the people hanging in the king's court; they weren't eating at the fine restaurants; they weren't the kind of neighbors you want moving into your neighborhood; they weren't the kind of people you hope will be in your LifeGroup. They were distressed and discontented and in debt; they were broken and bitter.

But in all honesty, that's the kind of person David had become. He didn't have it all together anymore; his life was a mess. But still the people gathered around **him**. And then comes this little phrase that's so important, "*and he became their leader*". That's a phrase you want to underline in your Bible. It's the turning point in David's story. Suddenly David starts acting like the anointed one again; suddenly David begins living into the call that God has on his life again.

Look at the following verses. Watch the anointed one reappear. First, he takes his parents to Moab for their safety. Remember, David's great grandmother was from Moab. Do you remember her name? It was Ruth. But David doesn't sneak into Moab like a fugitive telling lies or acting crazy. He walks right up to the king and asks him (verse 3) "*Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?*" No more lying or trickery but responsibility and trust as he waits to see what the Lord is going to do. So, when the prophet, Gad, shows up and tells him that God wants him to go into Judah, what does David do? He obeys.

David seems to be acting kingly again. He's trusting and obeying God. So, what happened? What caused the change? **It was the strange gift of broken people.** God used this ragamuffin group to shape David for his God given vocation – to live into the purposes for which God had called him. David would have never chosen these guys to be his posse – and no one would have guessed that their allegiance to him would cause David to become a better man – to begin living in obedience to God again. But God used them; God used them to point David in the right direction. And God used David to sweeten these bitter men as well. In fact, some of them would become those known as King David's Mighty Men – the great warriors of Israel listed in the book of Chronicles. It's a good thing that David didn't decide he was too good for them – that he could walk this road alone because God used this community, as broken as it was, not just to save David but to save all of Israel too.

It's pretty fascinating isn't it, but what does it have to do with us? Have you ever experienced the strange gift of broken people? I've had the joy of watching God at work in Tony and Kim Marinelli these last few years; their whole perspective on the world has changed because of their relationship with some kids in Romania – the kind of kids that most of us try to avoid. I could tell their story, but I want you to hear it from them, so I've asked them to come and share it with you. Would you please welcome and encourage Tony and Kim as they come?

Interview with Marinellis

- **A couple of years ago you guys decided to go on a mission trip to Romania to work at a camp for kids who have been placed in the care of the state. I've heard that it's a pretty hard group of kids. What was it like when they first arrived at the camp?**
 - Scary, anxious, why am I here
- **But something happened in your hearts that week; what did God do?**
 - We heard their stories, our hearts broke for them, we sensed a great need, we wanted them to know God loves them
- **God moved in your hearts enough that you made the costly arrangements to back last summer, and now you're planning on going to volunteer in the camp for an entire month this coming summer. When you walked into this sanctuary five years ago did you ever expect you'd be making arrangements to spend a month in Romania working with kids?**
 - No, we expected to be raising our own family, minding our own business, we never imagined God would give us a passion for kids in Romania
- **So, what has been the strange gift of broken people in your lives?**
 - We are more passionate than ever about Jesus, praying more, trusting more, caring more, putting our lives on the line for Jesus more, recognizing our own brokenness more

The truth is, each of us can also experience the strange gift of broken people; do you know where? Right here – it's called the church. We'll never be the church God wants us to be as long as we pick and choose the people that seem to have it all together to be the ones who are welcome here. We'll never live into our Holy Spirit anointing as a community of faith as long as we can't recognize our own brokenness and judgmental hearts.

So, when you come into the sanctuary on Sunday mornings do you avoid people that look troubled? Do you avoid people that don't look like you? When you go into the Gathering Place for a meal do you only sit with the people that you know and love or do you see that someone is sitting alone and sit with them? Are you waiting around for the 'right' people to ask you to be in a LifeGroup and avoiding the people that need you in their LifeGroup the most?

Here's the deal, every one of us is broken. All of us are works in progress. But it's the combination of those two concepts that will help us to be the community Christ is calling us to be. Many people will take a sermon like this as license to accept every kind of person without expectation. They say, "God loves everyone so we should accept everyone." I couldn't agree more. But God's loves me way too much to let me stay the way I am. The guys that rallied around David in the cave didn't stay the way they were in the cave at Adullam. They became the Mighty Men of David. I don't need community that loves me just the way I am with no expectation. That's not love. I need community that loves me enough in my brokenness to call me and compel me to wholeness ... and my community needs that from me.

That's what Jesus did. God's Son came from heaven to earth, the ultimate hideout for broken people. He gathered around him a group of unexpected men and women – not the brightest but the broken. Because of their fellowship with the Messiah Jesus – The Anointed One – they were forever changed – accepted in their brokenness but not affirmed in it. And the strange gift of those broken people is that they became the mothers and fathers of Christ's Church.

How is your heart toward broken people? Do you welcome them here? Have you become so lost in your own brokenness that you don't have space to love others? I pray that each of experiences the strange gift of broken people which is to draw us into a deeper connection with Christ and His Church.

As Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25, speaking of how it will be in the end.
Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me,' "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what

are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me.'

May it be so of us.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read the passage out loud.

Reflect & Apply Individually: Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church: write down some applications.

Reflect & Apply Together: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

Pray together: tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.

Dig deeper

1. How did the group of distressed, in debt and discontented people impact David's life?
2. How did David's experience of being on the run prepare for leading this particular group? What should we learn from his experience?
3. How has your life been impacted by your involvement with people who the world sees as broken?
4. What is it that God is asking you to do in this Scripture and adjoining sermon?