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## *Vagabond: The Gutsy Priest* I Samuel 22:6-23

This morning we come to the end of our "Vagabond" series. Does that make you sad? Say, "Whaaa." It's been a fascinating set of stories, hasn't it? A very different glimpse of David. For most of twenty years after Samuel anoints David as the new king, he is on the run for his life from crazy King Saul. God used those years to shape David for his throne, but we aren't going to see him as king yet. We'll leave that for another series. But on this communion Sunday, for our last message in this series, I want to take us back a couple of chapters to a tragic story about a crazy king and a gutsy priest.

Do you remember the first place David stopped on his run from Saul? Nob. The city of priests. David went to Ahimilech, the Chief Priest, for help. But he lied to him, remember? David told him that he was on a secret mission from the king. Then he asked for food and a weapon, which he got, and fled. But there was a little footnote right in the middle of that story. Do you remember? Verse 7: **"Now one of Saul's servants was [in Nob] that day, detained before the Lord; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd."** That's all you hear about Doeg and when you read the story, you wonder, "Why is he even mentioned? What is the point?" Well, in the next chapter, we discover the point.

One of the things I love about building houses in Mexico is that, for one week, I have no phone calls, no e mails, no TV. So, when we returned to San Diego, I was surprised to see that Libya was all over the news. Apparently, the people of that country, emboldened by what they have seen in other Egypt and other places, have decided that four decades of Moammar Gaddafi are enough. I think we could all agree with that. But Gaddafi is not going down without a fight. He is murdering his own people, paying off citizens to betray fellow Libyans, and his interviews reveal a delusional man completely out of touch with reality.

Sound familiar? Sound like a king you know? Saul's spies have located David but he is furious that they can't kill this guy and he convenes a council. Notice what he has in his hand as he sits underneath that tamarisk tree in his headquarters at Gibeah? His spear! Saul's infamous spear. Any time Saul showed up at a staff meeting with his pot sticker, everybody was on their toes! And almost immediately, his paranoia gushes out. "Why have you all conspired against me? David is trying to kill me and you are all part of his plot!" Nobody says anything. What could they say; this was crazy talk. It wasn't true. But no one speaks. Dead silence! Who wanted to draw

Saul's attention when he had a spear in his hand? But then pops up the villain of the story. Who? Slimy Doeg the Edomite. "I've got some information for you," he says. "David went to **your** High Priest in Nob who gave him food (true), a sword (true) and prayed for him (we don't know if that's true or not; but the story doesn't say so).

After Doeg tattles, Saul is furious and sends for Ahimelech. He arrives along with the other priests... all of them probably terrified. "Why have you conspired against me by helping the Son of Jesse?" Saul asks Ahimelech. **And here...we have one of the bravest performances you will find in the Bible by a very gutsy priest.** Ahimelech could have thrown David under the bus. "My lord, when David came to me, he claimed he was on a secret mission from you. When I helped him, I thought I was serving you. Obviously he lied to me!" That was true, wasn't it? David did lie. All Ahimelech had to do was tell what really happened.

Instead, **Ahimelech defends David.** Listen to his courageous words: **"Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household?"** "David is a good man, he says. He is faithful to you. Who has been a better servant to you than he?" That took guts, didn't it? Have you ever sat and listened as someone in your group runs down another person with lies...and said nothing? It takes guts to stand up for someone who is being slandered.

But Ahimelech's not done: "Was that day the first time I inquired of God for David? The first time I prayed for him? Of course not! I prayed for him then...as I have prayed for him many times before. Don't you want your High Priest praying for your servants?" Actually, we don't have any record in the story that Ahimelech did pray for David. Maybe he did. Or maybe he refused to let himself off on a technicality. He was the High Priest of the King. If the High Priest of the King wasn't going to pray for the King and his trusted servants...what good was he?

Ahimelech finishes: **"Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."** In other words, there is no conspiracy. I've done nothing wrong. I am innocent of the charges you make. Pretty gutsy.

**Ahimelech's response so infuriates Saul** that he orders his soldiers to kill the priests on the spot. But the soldiers are more afraid of God than their crazy king and they will not obey him. Saul goes apoplectic. Now even his own bodyguard is conspiring against him! What's a paranoid king to do? Well, there is one other person present. Doeg. He'll be happy to kill the priests for Saul. (Pre-count 85 people; have them stand...take sword down to them.) Here are 85 people. Think about it. One by one, all by himself, Doeg stepped up to each priest with his sword and killed him. (Have them sit, one by one) 85 times! But Doeg was an over-achiever. He then hiked 5 miles to Nob and killed every remaining living creature in

that town...women, children, babies, animals...everything! It is one of the bloodiest scenes in the Bible.

I have great admiration for Ahimelech, don't you? It took guts for him to stand up to Saul. It would have been so easy to throw David under the bus. But he wouldn't do it. And he paid an awful price...he and his entire family. All, that is, save one. Abiathar, Ahimelech's son, the last living priest, fled to David. And he brought one thing with him. Guess what. 23:6: "Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah." The ephod. The holy prayer garment of the high priest. Now David seems to have it all. Saul clings to power but David has the last priest...David has the ephod...David has the Lord's favor and Saul is obviously doomed.

Did you notice David's words when Abiathar arrived? "***I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family!***" David said. And of course, he was right. If David hadn't run to the High Priest for help, Ahimelech and the priests would still be alive. And remember, David lied to him. Why? Because he was afraid Ahimelech wouldn't help him if he knew the truth? Maybe. Or maybe he was trying to protect Ahimelech from King Saul's wrath: **plausible deniability, the politicians call it.** Either way, David lied to Ahimelech; he used him for his own ends...and it cost the High Priest his life...along with every other inhabitant of Nob. "I am responsible...," David said. Those three words are among the most noble in the English language... although they are not very common in our culture today, are they? Our first instinct is to find someone to blame for what we have done wrong. What a difference it would make if more of us could say, with David, "***I am responsible!***"

I'll bet the guilt of that moment haunted David for the rest of his life. Wouldn't it you? If you were responsible for the death of the High Priest because of your lies, your deceit, your manipulation, your selfishness, your fear, your faithlessness...how would you deal with that? What would you say if **you** were responsible for the death of the High Priest?

Well...how about, "Thank you!" Because you are. You are responsible for the death of the High Priest. The Great High Priest. His name is Jesus. It IS because of your lies, your deceit, your manipulation, your selfishness, your fear, your faithlessness... not just you collectively ...but you and you and you individually...and me. It is because of our sin that Jesus, the Great High Priest was killed. If you don't understand that...if you don't understand that you—personally—your sin is responsible for the death of Jesus, then you really don't understand the gravity of your sin. And you really don't understand the magnitude of God's love for you. Our loving High Priest died, not because we tricked him or manipulated him...but because loved us and laid down his life to save ours.

Do you know where the phrase "high priest" appears more than any other place in the Bible? The book of Hebrews in the New Testament. 17 times that phrase is

used...almost as many times as in the entire Old Testament put together! Listen to what Hebrews says about our Great High Priest, Jesus:

**4:14 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.***

**7: 26 *Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.***

In a way that we will probably never comprehend, when our High Priest Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross, he saved you. And he saved me. From every ugly, broken thing we have ever done or thought about doing. In the courageous death of the high priest Ahimelech, we get a glimpse of the Greater High Priest who would one day lay down his life to save the whole world. **What do we do with such a gift?** Well, back to Hebrews one more time: **4:16 *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”***

That is what this meal is about. As we approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, it reminds us of the self-sacrifice of Jesus, our Great High Priest, who died once and for all so that we might be saved. Aren’t you glad your High Priest didn’t throw you under the bus? Aren’t you glad for your salvation? Like David before Him, Jesus utters these words to us: **Stay with me; don’t be afraid...you will be safe with me.**

Here’s this morning’s punch line. Guess who else have been called to be priests? Us! You and I! I Peter 2: 9 “But you are a chosen people, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Revelation 1:5 “...to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom **and priests** to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”

We who have been saved by our High Priest are now called to be a community of priests, anointed by the Holy Spirit to serve each other and the world. Today we ask the Holy Spirit to anoint some of his special priests in our church to the office of elder and deacon. It takes guts to say yes to God’s call to be a priest. It takes guts to lead and serve a church in an antagonistic culture. These folks have guts; they have said Yes. Join me in welcoming them forward for their service of ordination.

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Read the passage out loud.** I Samuel 22:6-23

- **Reflect Individually:** Please, before anyone says anything and before interacting with the questions below, take a few moments to jot down some personal reflections on this unsettling story.

1. What do you find that is shocking in this story?

2. Does any of this seem predictable—simply “the way things are” in the real world of rulers and powers?

3. Is there anything you think Ahimelech should have done differently at any part of the story (including its beginning in 21: 1-9)? If so, what?

4. Is there anything David should have done differently, as the Lord’s anointed?

- **Apply:** What might the Lord be saying to you, to the church, to the world, through this passage?