

UNRAVELED

SEEKING GOD WHEN OUR PLANS FALL APART

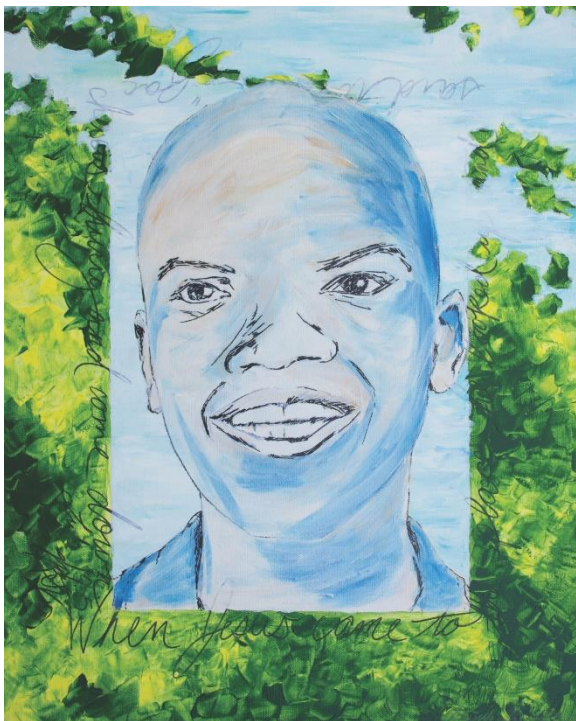
What happens when our world falls apart? How do we press onward when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose ends? What do we become when our identity—or the path we’re on—comes undone? What if all this is not the end we fear it will be?

In our unraveling, sometimes life surprises us with unexpected joy, love, and hope—with a new beginning we couldn’t have imagined. Sometimes we need God to unravel us, for we long to be changed. Throughout the summer we will explore biblical stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations. There are stories where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans—and us—into something new.

July 7, 2019 Luke 19:1-10 (NRSV)

Zacchaeus the Wealthy Tax Collector: Radical Unraveling of Vocation

19 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. **2** A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. **3** He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. **4** So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. **5** When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” **6** So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. **7** All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” **8** Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” **9** Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”



The account of Jesus and Zacchaeus in Jericho is found only in Luke’s gospel. Zacchaeus is a wealthy tax collector, which means he is not welcomed by most. Jesus flips the script by inviting Zacchaeus to offer him hospitality, which unravels the crowd’s expectations since they deem Zacchaeus a sinner and an unworthy host. Jesus invites Zacchaeus into community. Jesus invites Zacchaeus to belong. Zacchaeus responds with generosity, vowing to share his resources equitably. Zacchaeus shows us a holy and joyful unraveling.

Artist, Hannah Garrity, reflects on her painting, “Jesus Looked Up” (left), saying, “Seeing, taking notice, acknowledging, lifting up—Jesus did all of these things as he looked up at Zacchaeus, calling him down, resting love and responsibility on his shoulders.... In this image, Jesus looks up with grace. A shimmer of gold on his skin represents the presence of God in him. He takes notice of a selfish, greedy, and immature adult.... By the standards of society, exhibited by the comments of those around him, this man does not deserve to be acknowledged. When he is finally seen, all of his immaturity melts away. He immediately rises to the occasion. Take notice, acknowledge, lift up. See.”

Guiding Questions:

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story? For Zacchaeus and his vocation? For the crowd and their expectations about who is and isn't worthy? About who are the "lost" that Jesus has come to "seek out and to save?"
- Why does Zacchaeus anticipate Jesus' arrival? What makes him believe Jesus might show mercy to a tax collector? (See Luke 5:27-32; 7:34; 18:9-14; 18:18-30).
- According to Jewish law, restitution required paying back original funds plus one-fifth more (Lev. 6:5; Num. 5:7). What does it mean that Zacchaeus offers to repay those whom he has defrauded four times more than what he took? What converts his greed into radical generosity?
- Are there ways that we, like Zacchaeus, need to examine our vocation/calling to better reflect God's love and generosity?

We Make Such Careful Plans, O Lord

A Hymn Text Inspired by Luke 19:1-10

Stephen M. Fearing, 2019

We make such careful plans, O Lord; we think we know your mind.
We do all things on our accord and seek to find our own reward.
Despite all we've designed, sometimes we're misaligned.

Zacchaeus thought he knew it all; he though he knew his place.
He climbed a tree for he was small then Jesus came to change his call
And met him face to face to help him grow in grace.

Zacchaeus had a change of heart; his greed had took its toll.
Vocation called him to restart; he know that he was set apart
To help the poor be whole, to comfort and console.

A radical unraveling will sometimes come our way,
When God unveils a newer thing upon the road we're traveling
So help us, God we pray, your holy will obey.