

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 this summer we have explored biblical stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations. These are stories where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling of our plans—and us—into something new.

September 1, 2019 (NRSV) – Mark 5:1-20 Jesus Heals Legion, A Man Possessed by Demons

5 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.^[a] **2** And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. **3** He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; **4** for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. **5** Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. **6** When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; **7** and he shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” **8** For he had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” **9** Then Jesus^[b] asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” **10** He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. **11** Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; **12** and the unclean spirits^[c] begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.” **13** So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

14 The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. **15** They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. **16** Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. **17** Then they began to beg Jesus^[d] to leave their neighborhood. **18** As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. **19** But Jesus^[e] refused, and said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.” **20** And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Footnotes:

- a. [Mark 5:1](#) Other ancient authorities read *Gergesenes*; others, *Gadarenes*
- b. [Mark 5:9](#) Gk *he*
- c. [Mark 5:12](#) Gk *they*
- d. [Mark 5:17](#) Gk *him*
- e. [Mark 5:19](#) Gk *he*

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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Theme Connections

A man shunned from town and labeled a demoniac lives with the daily unraveling of his mind and is tortured by a legion of voices, which impel him to violently self-harm. But perhaps he could perceive something the townspeople could not when he sees Jesus approaching the shoreline, for he breaks free from his shackles and bows at Jesus' feet. His healing disrupts the status quo of the town, as a herd of pigs drown to their death and the townspeople fear the consequences of Legion being set free. How do we respond when the status quo of our towns, churches, families—is disrupted? How can we better care for those whose minds have unraveled into illness?

Prayer: *O God, unravel my need for answers into awe for the wonders of your expansive mystery. Amen.*

From the Artist –Hannah Garrity reflects on her painting, *“Begged to Leave,”* acrylic & ink on canvas:



Have you ever seen the illustration of equity vs. equality? There is a young child standing next to a young teenager and an adult. They all wish to see over a fence. In the description of equality, they each get a box that is the same size. The adult now towers over the fence, the teenager can see, but the child is still unable to see what's on the other side. In the depiction of equity, they each get a different sized box. Now, all of their heads are peering comfortably over the fence. Why are we afraid of equity?

In the land of the Gerasenes, Jesus shows us what it looks like. He provides healing for an outcast of society, the man shows gratitude, and he evangelizes. This sounds like a moment we would rejoice in. Instead the townspeople beg Jesus to leave. Do they fear scarcity? But we know that God provides in abundance. Do they fear grace? But we yearn for God's grace. Do they fear for their safety?

Why do humans fear the radical grace of God? Why did the people of Gerasene fear Jesus? We laud Jesus' work in the gospel as the work we must replicate. We teach our children to think of what Jesus would do. However, time and again history shows us that when we truly work toward the embodiment of the gospel, humans interrupt the work. Humans killed Jesus.

Guiding Questions:

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Imagine this story through the lens of fear. How does fear impact each of the characters and their actions?
- Whom do you identify with most in this story and why?
- Imagine rewriting the end of this story. How could the townspeople respond to Legion's healing instead of with fear and by forcing Jesus away? What would it look like for the community to welcome and embrace Legion?

For Further Reflection: Hymn writer, the Rev. Stephen M. Fearing, says that ever since his preaching professor made his class read this story aloud at the busiest intersection in downtown Atlanta while traffic thundered by, he's always been infatuated by this story of a man with an incessant cacophony going on inside his head. The last verse speaks of the man's peace at the end of a harrowing journey.

A Man in Wretched Agony

*A man in wretched agony
falls down 'fore Jesus by the sea.
The chains that bound him wrenched apart;
He begs this demon to depart.*

*His flesh is bruised by many stones.
His body bent with broken bones.
He cries aloud, his torment great;
Long anguished by his cruel fate.*

*The demon's rule unravels fast;
By Jesus' word its reign is past.
The people wondered at the sign,
As demons leapt into the swine.*

*The man, renewed and purified,
Begs Jesus, "keep me by your side!"
But Jesus bids him testify
That God's mercy may multiply.*