

Lord God, who calms the troubled waters, we bless you for your presence in the midst of all our fears, all our trials, all our worries. We release to you the things we hold too tightly, and we trust your words of peace. Be among us in this hour and may we lean into your everlasting arms of love, secure that we are yours, now and always. ... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.

I had a realization the other day... I am not what I used to be!

Perhaps you're laughing to yourself... well yes, Pat you're not... so glad you looked in the mirror, Pat... or a host of other thoughts or comments.

Really, I am not who or what I used to be. And I came to this realization as I was looking for the lid I had dropped for a water bottle. That opaque color of the lid blended pretty well with the floor tile of greys and white marble swirl.

When I was young, you see, I was the finder of things for my grandmother. If something dropped, I found it and picked it up... buttons, lids, earrings. There wasn't anything I couldn't find. This ability to 'see things' also included threading needles. My grandmother sewed a lot! And she was often in need of needles to be threaded. That was my job.

But when the bottle cap fell and it took me 5 minutes to locate the darn thing, I realized I was a lot like my grandmother now... though I am not what I once was. I love the memories I have of my grandmother, and I do wish that I had more of the ability to work with threads, and yarns, to create visual products of art.

The gift with threads that I possess is more related to rope tying and making connections or disentangling webs and knots. Yes, that's my area... making connections and disentangling messes... to smooth things for useful relationships.

When I came across this series, UNRAVELED, I thought... ooo, that's intriguing. I'm good at unraveling things. As I read more, I realized that there are many applications to life in unraveling's and new creations. As I looked at my own life, I

vividly remembered those moments of the world falling apart... holding on by a thread... and the challenge to knit frayed ends together for strength and new life.

So, friends, we will spend time looking at our lives from a biblical narrative where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans... our lives... and weaves us into something new.

Today we start with Abram & Sarai, who have been faithful in following God and God's call to leave their homeland and move to an unknown place, to live among unknown people, and to make this new place their home. They were 75 and 65 when they moved.

God has promised to make Abram a great nation (Gen 12, 15) but their advanced age puts this in doubt. Abram & Sarai have family, but do not have children of their own. In chapter 16, Sarai takes matters into her own hands, using Hagar as a surrogate to bear an heir. In Gen 17, Abraham has heard God's promise that he and Sarah will bear children, and he has laughed in disbelief (100yo & 90 yo). Now, once again, both Abraham and Sarah hear the promise. This time it is Sarah who laughs, although she denies it.

As we look into the stories, we will consider: what has unraveled? What are the results of unraveling? How is God at work in the unraveling? What might we learn from the story of unraveling?

To be clear, the undercurrent issue is the pain of infertility & miscarriage Sarah carries into her older years. When the angel appears to say she will have a child, we can just imagine the surprise, the disbelief... and the joy... that would come with such a statement. But, too, there would be hurt as well. And so Sarah's disbelief at the probability of pregnancy unravels into laughter.

I want to be mindful that 'unraveling' is not necessarily a negative or undesired moment or circumstance. The dictionary (American Heritage, 890) states unravel to be a verb (action) 1) to separate (entangled threads) 2) to separate and clarify the elements of (something mysterious or baffling); to solve.

That Sarah laughed at the mystery of such an occurrence is quite understandable at her age. What happens next is the next moment of unraveling... what do Abraham and Sarah believe is possible for God?

Abraham had his laughter moment of disbelief with God (Gen 17), and God said for the child to be named Isaac (he laughs), and God gives other covenant instructions. As we heard, Abraham and Sarah carry them out.

Sarah is full of joy and knows laughter will be part of her world from now on.

Walter Brueggeman interprets verse 6 this way: *Beyond the etymological explanations which link Isaac to 'laugh', and beyond doubtful embarrassment, Sarah laughs because 'God has made laughter for me.' By God's powerful word, God has broken the grip of death, hopelessness, and barrenness. The joyous laughter is the end of sorrow and weeping (Mt 5:4; Lk6:21; John 16:20-24). Laughter is a biblical way of receiving a newness that cannot be explained. The newness is a sheer gift – underived, unwarranted. Barrenness has now become ludicrous. It can be laughed at because there is "full joy" (John 16:24).*

What might it look like for our disbelief to unravel into joy... irrepressible, inexpressible joy?

Perhaps it is in the birth of a child... a grandchild or a niece or nephew or great-grandchild... especially after a difficult pregnancy or prospect of pregnancy.

Perhaps it is in receiving the call that you've been approved to adopt a child.

Perhaps your joy is found after devastation due to illness and the tragic moment of loss in the life of another, you can receive an organ to sustain life.

Perhaps it is joy that is found when on death row and a young law school intern comes to tell you that you will not have an execution date in the next year and he will work to get the conviction overturned due to new evidence you did not commit the crime and you burst out in song. (Just Mercy)

The thing is, our prayers aren't always answered in this way, but what we can trust is... sometimes, even when life seems to fall apart, God can surprise us and unravel our plans with unexpected joy, if we are willing to receive it.

As for me... I found that pesky bottle cap.

But, that moment of joy thinking of my Grandmother was worth every second bent over, searching, scanning, and finally finding the lid for the water bottle. And I was singing that song she liked to play on the piano... *Shine on; shine, on harvest moon, up in the sky.*

....Let's pray... *and I invite you to repeat after me...*

O God, you have shown me the path of life.

I trust in your unfailing love.

I trust in your forgiveness and grace.

I trust that you love me.

May the life I live be a light that reflects your love to others.

This I pray, in Jesus name.

Amen.