

**Seed on Rock**  
**Luke 8:4-8**

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**October 29, 2017**

I have the greatest news for you. Actually it is a word of relief for any Christian who has felt either inadequate or burdened by an expectation that you are to somehow persuade everyone you know to follow in the Christian way. Here's the good news: That's not your job. That's God's job, the Spirit's job, in the Spirit's own good time, which is most usually not our time. But we do have a role to play. It's just that we are not in charge.

Today's parable from Jesus is all about that. In fact, most of his agrarian parables are too. A farmer goes out to his field and sows the seed. He wakes up one morning and tender shoots are breaking the surface, but he knows not how. It is the mystery of life and growth and God. He is plunged into wonder.

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, and yet it grows into the largest of plants so that the birds of the air nest in its branches.

This mustard weed, this kudzu of the Middle East, springs up to provide a home for the birds of the air, a symbol of the messianic kingdom of the future.

One after another the parables lift up the unseen energy behind the curtain, the animating power of the universe. It is pure mystery.

And in today's parable, the parable of the Sower, we have it again, but with another twist.

We begin with the familiar sight – a sower went out to sow. It is planting season and the farmer casts seed – by hand – into the fields. Already we know that the farmer is participating in the miracle of growth. But what is unexpected is how that seed is received.

Some of the seed falls upon the path, is trampled on and the birds eat it up. It never had a chance.

Some of the seed falls on stone, and there is simply not enough soil to root in and it can't take the scorching sun; it withers up and dies.

Some of the seed falls among thorns, and as it grows up it is choked and cannot flourish.

And some of the seed falls in good, rich soil and it grows up strong and resilient, bearing a hundred fold, which is a bountiful harvest.

How you interpret this parable depends on where you are standing.

**On one level** it's just a jolting story about God's relationship to the world, and you just don't know where the spirit will flourish. It's wildly unpredictable. Surely this is true; just look around. How do you know where the ways of the Spirit will flourish and where and how? We don't know who or when.

**On the deepest spiritual level**, especially if we place the Source, the Giver of all Life, into the role of the sower, we may identify with one of the many recipients of the seeds of the Spirit.

Are we hard and barren and the seed never has a chance? Is our soil, our faith, so shallow, that it cannot endure adversity? Does the Word of God grow in us at one point, but the thorns of our many entanglements and concerns and false paths just strangle it out? And is there a part of us that is deep enough, rich enough, to make fertile growing space for the Spirit within us?

If we look at the parable this way it leads us to deepen our spirituality, open ourselves to God, quit looking for the answer in things that pass away, and enrich our faith so that the seed of the Spirit can take root and grow strong, resilient in the face of pressure, suffering, temptation, boredom and all the rest. This faithful resilience of heart and mind is developed over a lifetime, and is cultivated by prayer, mindful study, and compassionate service.

**But there is another way** to interpret this parable of Jesus, and that is from the viewpoint of one who has discovered the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl of great price, the waiting parent receiving a lost child.

When a person is overcome by the peace that passes understanding he or she becomes an ambassador of that peace. It is natural to share this grace. It is natural to share it just like a sower who went out to sow.

In fact, the Gospel writer Matthew illuminates this parable of Jesus in a midrash; a teaching allegory that immediately follows the parable. It was provided, no doubt, to disciples who were confounded by the variable ways in which the seed of the Spirit either took root or didn't, or took root temporarily and died. Why, they wanted to know, does the seed of the Spirit take root in some people's lives and not in others? Why do some never get it? Why are people enthusiastic in one time of their lives but not another? How is the seed of faith misplaced or lost along the way?

Matthew says that the seed is like the word of God and the sower is a faithful disciple scattering it wherever they walk. The reception to this seed is wildly different, depending on the life that receives it at the time.

All these various conditions of the human heart determine how the wildly extravagant sowing doesn't have a chance, or is received for a little while but has no staying power, or is strangled out by the cares of the world, or flourishes. It's the condition of the soils, not the seed, that makes the difference.

And what of the sower? Here's where the liberation comes in, good Christians. The sower is in no way responsible for the outcome. You can just shake off that false obligation. Individual Christians are not responsible for the faith response of another. The church is not responsible for the faith of any person, not responsible for their responsiveness, seriousness, openness, or degree to which they make it a priority in their lives. That's not the responsibility of the sower.

The sower has one responsibility and it is straight forward and simple: sow the seed. That's it. You sow the seed by word, or story, of deed, or example. But you are in no way responsible for outcomes or results. Are you feeling lighter yet?

In fact, in many stories in the life of Jesus the response of the people varies greatly – everything from being tepid to being hostile, from indifferent to combative. When a town will not receive your good news, Jesus said, just stamp the dust off your feet and go down the road. You are not responsible. The apostle Paul and company proclaims the good news and gets beat up and imprisoned for it – not his responsibility for the reception or outcome. On to the next place, the next person.

Timing is everything and maybe it's not the time today or tomorrow or even until the very end of life. It's not up to you.

Like another parable of Jesus, the foreman goes down to the market square to find day laborers. Some are ready to go when he arrives and others come later, even as late as the last working hour of the day. At the end they all get paid the same and it is no concern of the Foreman. God will be gracious to whom God will be gracious. It's not the responsibility of the sower to figure this out.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares the workers ask if they should weed the field of the imposter plants and toss them aside and the owner says that no, because you might damage the good wheat as you try to root out the weeds. Let them grow to harvest and everything will be sorted out. It's not their job, that will be sorted out by the One who knows all hearts from the aspect of eternity. Just sow the seed and cultivate the field as best you can. But you are not responsible for outcomes.

Do the right thing and let the chips fall where they may. Stay with your integrity; you are not responsible for the integrity of others.

So for instance you find yourself in a faith conversation with a co-worker or friend or even harder, a family member. You share what is important to you. If they are open enough you invite them to join you at church or your study group or your mission project. You make yourself spiritually available. You sow the seed. But you are not responsible for their response to your invitation.

Some seed falls on the path, some on rock, some among thorns, and some in rich soil. If not today, then maybe a year from today, a decade from today.

Even more, life shifts the soil. Erosion takes place, floods come and silt the valleys, some thorns are removed, and new openings arise. Tragedy and suffering soften up hardened hearts to a new openness. You are not responsible for all that changing. All you are responsible for is sowing the seed. You are not God. You are only the avenue of the Spirit.

As one of the Rabbis once said, place the word upon the heart. And someday if their heart breaks, it may fall in.

When you think about all this runs wildly counter to our present expectations of evidence-based everything. You can't have a therapy or practice or model with evidence-based, outcomes based data.

The Christian faith is exactly opposite that because we walk by faith and not by sight. We are charged to become extravagant sowers without knowing the evidence or outcomes. We know our job which is to be little Christs in the world. Know your job and what your job is not. The rest is up to God.

Welcome to freedom. Welcome to non-coercive Christianity. Welcome to sowing the seed in love with no conditions attached. Welcome to open-hearted hospitality. Welcome to invitational Christian faith. This is what we want at Broadway, don't we? Connect without control, connect in love with no strings attached.

Once upon a time the Broadway community of faith went out to sow the seeds of the Spirit. Those seeds fell in so many different places that it was entirely unpredictable what would become of them. But they didn't worry about that a bit because *their job was to sow not to make them grow.*

One of my very favorite poems is about just this and it's titled *Anyway* and it is attributed to Mother Teresa:

**People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.**

**If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.**

**If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.**

**If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.**

**What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.**

**If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.**

**The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.**

**Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.**

**In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.**

*-this version is credited to Mother Teresa*

Once upon a time, a sower went out to sow ...

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Thanks be to God.