

Sowing on Rocky Ground
Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

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When was the last time you planted seeds? How did you do it? *(leave space for input from the congregation)* Was it in those germination trays in the early spring so your plants would be ready to put into the ground in May? Did you plant seeds directly into the ground? How did you prepare the ground you were planting in? Did you get some peat moss or manure to enrich the soil?

Our actual sowing of seeds usually involves a lot of planning and care even in our backyard. I imagine in the agricultural world there is even more planning and care. Farmers work hard to produce the best crop that they can. Every effort is made to be efficient in the sowing of their seed. It is how we live our lives today – as efficiently as possible with every resource used to the max. We squeak out every percentage yield that is possible.

Therefore, the sower in this morning's gospel will be very strange for us, because he is anything but efficient. He goes out and throws the seed all over the place. Some falls on rocky ground, some on the hard-beaten path, some among the thorns, and some actually on fertile soil. Why didn't the farmer concentrate on the fertile soil? Why was he wasting the seed?

Now of course this is a parable about how God sows the seed of God's message of love and redemption in the world. And so in this parable, we see the generosity and abundance of God flinging seed everywhere to see where it might reach – even sowing it in inhospitable places. I give thanks for this generosity of sowing because which one of us has not been the fertile soil we aim to be that receives God's word. We have all been the rocky ground, or the beaten path and the soil filled with thorns. We have all been in places where God's message has been sown within us, but it has not flourished and yet God keeps sowing – throwing the seed wherever it may fall.

What is truly amazing is that even though the sower has employed this method of sowing that we may find wasteful, the harvest is plentiful. The harvest is not just a good harvest. The harvest is a hundred-fold, sixty-fold, and thirty-fold. The harvest is above and beyond anything we can imagine. This is the abundance of God and it is happening right now. You may say - this world doesn't look like one where God's harvest is being produced a hundred-fold and this is where we have to trust in God – trust that God is working and that the kingdom of God is coming – the time when the harvest will be complete.

In the meantime, how will we be part of the sowing? We are not the sower, but we can help the seeds along with water and with care – maybe a touch of fertilizer here and there. We can offer a helping hand, a listening ear, our presence, the sharing our story of God at work in our lives and offering prayer. The question I have for you today is can you do all that with the abandon of the sower. Will you do your nurturing only on the seeds that have been thrown in fertile soil or will you take a chance on the seeds in the

rocky soil or the beaten path? The beaten path can be broken up and the rocks can be removed. The thorns can be pulled up. God is powerful so perhaps we too should look for those places where we don't think God can be heard.

Last Tuesday at our evening service, I shared the story of Dr. Virji¹. Dr. Virji is a Moslem who lives in Dawson, Minnesota, with his wife and kids for the past 5 years. He went there because he loved the welcome the town had given him 3 years before. The local butcher even offered to prepare meat according to halal law. However, much changed during the 2016 election season.

Dr. Virji, a Muslim of Indian descent, born in Kenya, raised in Florida, educated at Georgetown, began to look at job opportunities in Dubai. Then a patient, the Lutheran student minister, Mandy France, asked him if he would give a talk about Islam to the Dawson community, to dispel some of the fearful things people were saying about Moslems. He did and it was well received. Another invitation came from a nearby town and that was a disaster. People came with bibles and threats and Dr. Virji left in a hurry with his family. Dr. Virji wanted nothing to do with giving talks anymore but the invitations kept coming. He received an invitation from Granite Falls a small town about an hour away. Everyone advised him not to go. One neighbor even offered a bullet proof vest which he did not wear.

But he went and he spoke. He told them that should not let zealots define who Moslems are. He said it hurts us even more when we do that because they're saying that God said this? Muhammad said this? Never in a million years." Dr. Virji talked about the Christians zealots for example the LRA, the Lord's Resistance Army, the cultish Ugandan rebel Christians group blamed for the deaths of more than 100,000 people. What if he let those Christian zealots define who Christianity was?

He talked about how easy it is for us to demonize one another. He talked about the purpose of their meeting being to know one another," He quoted Koran verses to explain how there is no compulsion to convert people to Islam, and how Islam means peace. The people in Granite Falls listened and their response was to agree that Christians can judge, to apologize and that he had been heard. They applauded him at the end.

This is an example of rocky ground where Dr. Virji took the chance to talk about the God he knows and to connect which bore fruit. This is the risk God takes as he sows seed in all sorts of places and this is the risk that we are asked to take as we nurture that seed that God is throwing everywhere. Is our rocky ground or beaten path the teenager with headphones in all the time who we come to realize is listening to what we say or our grumpy neighbor who we smile at no matter what or our patience and continued conversation with our twenty something year old child who wants nothing to do with church?

¹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/dr-ayaz-virji-people-dawson-minnesota/>

Trust that the sower is at work. Our work is to pay attention to how God is working and join in. Never discount how God might be working because God works in unexpected ways. Just be willing to be part of the nurturing whether it be rocky ground, the beaten path, the soil with thorns or the fertile soil. See where the God who is the abundant generous sower will take us.