

## Thoughts from the Garden

“Slow down,” were Mary Lou’s words of advice as I unsuccessfully attempted for the umpteenth time to turn under the winter rye without having any of the leaves stick up through the soil. Back in October we planted this winter rye as a cover crop. It sprouted up green and grass-like, lay dormant for the winter, and began growing quickly with the early arrival of spring weather. Several weeks ago, we started to carefully turn the six inch stalks upside-down with pitchforks, bit by bit, so the plant matter would breakdown and further enrich the soil before spring sowing. With every flipped forkful, I was left with half of the plant reaching up defiantly through the soil. I was finding this to be a painfully frustrating experience, and my patience for the task waned quickly. When Mary Lou offered her, “slow down,” I couldn’t imagine how turning the fork more slowly would help at all and said something to that effect, ungrateful for the advice.



When Mary Lou walked away to another task, I continued turning the soil, repeating to myself, despite my pride, “slow down, slow down.” I experimented with different turning techniques, and in my attention to the work, noticed the way the rye was growing. This, then, helped me to be discerning as to where I placed the fork and how I turned the earth. Suddenly, what I found to be exasperating was flowing and easy. It was as if the pitchfork, the soil and I were one. It only happened because I took Mary Lou’s advice and slowed down. My body continued to move at the same speed, but my mind was slower, more focused and attentive, and I moved with an intentionality that was absent before. This isn’t to say that all of the green rye was easily buried under the soil every time, but the few pieces that remained uncovered didn’t taunt me as before, and I patiently buried them as they arose.

I find this advice coming back to me frequently as I move (too quickly) through life. As I braided the Easter bread, anxious to have enough time for it to rise once more before baking, I reminded myself, “slow down,” and I actually felt the smooth elasticity of the dough between my fingers, smelling its sweetness. As I filled the goats’ bowls with their afternoon grain worrying that I would be late getting home, I remembered, “slow down,” and encountered the goats as they ate, enjoying their tongues darting out to finish every last crumb. As I listen to a long story, read a lengthy email, meet an unexpected visitor, answer a surprise phone call, all the while eager to move onto the next thing, “slow down” resonates, and I hear a profound truth, read a bit of wisdom, encounter God in my neighbor, share a moment with a friend. As I sit in prayer, available to God and accomplishing none of my “important” tasks, I am reminded again, “slow down.” It is

only when I slow down my mind and focus that I can begin to notice God in each moment.



I had a dream last night. I remember it only vaguely, but this part is clear. Two sisters who recently lost their mother were speaking to me of their loss. One said to me, “I am filled with grief over the time we didn’t spend - that work was more important to me than relationship.” My unconscious shouting at me in dreams - “slow down!” Notice how the rye grows, discern each forkful, turn the soil with intention, mend the pieces I miss. “Slow down!” Notice relationships, discern each step, turn to God with intention, mend and reconcile when I err. Slow down. Pay attention. There is no need to mindlessly rush. Live slowly, live fully, and listen to Mary Lou’s advice.

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