

Jesus picks up right where Pastor Jen left off.

Last week, Pastor Jen ended her sermon with an invitation, or maybe a challenge:  
*Part of that living in the mystery might mean the daring, scary, challenging act of ---- going to sleep.*

*Edward Hays says that sleep "is a beautiful expression of prayer since it is resting in God. It is letting go of control of our life..."*

*So sleep well ... children from above.*

*Close your eyes and rest -- as a radical act of faith.*

Today Jesus gives us a picture of a faithful farmer, who does just that after scattering seed in the ground, night after night as that seed sprouts and grows he knows not how.

It's a simple story, but a radical idea for those of us in the twenty-four hour city powered by a manic western culture that brought us the electric light bulb and the personal stress test.

It takes a lot of faith and trust, which we in practical terms might translate laziness and naivete, to let the seed grow by itself, in its own time, without our managerial interference.

A modern Jewish parable recorded by Nathan Ausubel tells of two brothers who lived in the city and visited the country.

They saw a farmer plowing.

*"What on earth is he doing that for!" they wondered.*

*He turns up the earth and leaves deep furrows in it.*

*Why should someone take a smooth piece of land covered with nice green grass and dig it up?"*

*Later they watched the farmer sowing grains of wheat along the furrows.*

*"That man must be crazy!" they exclaimed.*

*"He takes good wheat and throws it in the dirt."*

*"I don't like the country!" one said in disgust.*

*"Only crazy people live here."*

*So he returned to the city.*

*His brother who remained in the country saw a change take place only several weeks later.*

*He wrote his brother in the city, who came out again to see golden heads of wheat.*

*When the wheat became ripe the farmer brought his scythe and began to cut it down.*

*At this the impatient (brother) exclaimed: "The farmer is crazy!*

*How hard he worked all these months to produce this lovely wheat, and now with his own hands he is cutting it down!*

*I'm disgusted with such an idiot and I'm going back to the city!"* (from A Treasury of Jewish Folklore, ed.

Nathan Ausubel, 1948, as recorded by Brian Stoffregen's exegetical notes at [crossmarks.com](http://crossmarks.com))

There is a rhythm to the workings of creation that calls forth in us a patience, a trust, and an attentiveness that we rarely display.

Wayne Muller writes:

*When we live without listening to the timing of things--when we live and work in twenty-four-hour shifts without rest--we are on war time, mobilizing for battle.*

*Yes, we are strong and capable people, we can work without stopping, faster and faster, electric lights making artificial day so the whole machine can labor without ceasing.*

*But remember: no living thing lives like this.*

*There are greater rhythms that govern how life grows: circadian rhythms, seasons and hormonal cycles and sunsets and moonrises and great movements of seas and stars.*

*We are part of the creation story, subject to all its laws and rhythms. (Muller, Sabbath, 1999, p. 68-69)*

The parables of Jesus about growing seeds are odd to us because we don't allow time or space to watch them: our dealings with them are limited to flowerboxes and carefully manicured green spaces and the mustard seeds we want but fail to suffocate out of the sidewalk.

We remain on war time, and war is bad for crops, and for people, and now we are learning, for the whole of the earth itself.

We as a species have trampled the earth in our unbending thirst to produce more plastic and to destroy one another.

Almost any scientist not on an oil company's payroll will convince you--if you allow the time to listen--that our planet is hemorrhaging from the excesses of human greed and impatience and what we for a long time called "progress."

Glaciers are melting, species are dying and forests are disappearing at unimaginable speeds.

Missing from all this industrialized destruction has been attentiveness.

It's hard to listen when you haven't had enough sleep, and when you idolize paycheck over patience.

Finally now, in this generation, humanity is beginning to pay attention on a global scale, and the green movement is gaining real traction in corporate, cultural and religious sectors.

We are finally recognizing the devastating effects of our sleepless over-management, seeing that we have basically become farmers who choke the seed because we will not let go of it.

But a question haunts those who study the sciences of ecological danger:

Is it too late?

Will we be able to reverse our destruction and save the only home we have?

I believe the answer to both questions is no.

No, we won't be able to save our imperiled planet.

And no, it's not too late--because sown deep within the earth is the wisdom to save itself.

Like the sleeping and rising farmer, we know not how.

Nor will even our most earnest scientists be able to figure it out fully or fast enough.

Our attentiveness needs to be directed instead at reducing and eliminating the threats to the health of the earth, trusting that with time and the absence of interference, our intricately balanced and resilient home will be able to heal itself.

One of those threats, of course--the one over which we have the most control--is in the mirror.

How does our sleeplessness and impatience contribute to the illness of creation?

Do we really need our own cars, especially in the city?

Do we need to eat mass-produced meat with every meal?

Do we need to work so late into the night?

I remember vividly watching footage of the fires burning Yellowstone National Park about twenty years ago with horror in my heart.

My Dad had taken me there a few years prior, and I had never experienced such beauty.

Now it was an ashen wasteland, and as I shared my sadness with my Dad, he surprised me.

"Best thing that could have happened," he said.

Dad, uneducated but very wise, went on to explain to me that the fires would keep humans out of the forest, allowing it to grow back, in time, richer and fuller and healthier than ever. He hoped they would keep the park closed to the public for a long time.

He knew that human beings could not bring growth, but they could stifle it.

What is true at Yellowstone is true around the earth.

If we have the courage and the faith to leave it alone, it will come back and flourish.

Good farmers do not bring growth, but they do attentively remove the obstacles.

The sleeping and rising farmer does not coax up the wheat, but she does clear the field of trouble, including the threat of her own careless footsteps upon the land.

The good farmer recognizes that not only is he a caretaker of creation, but also a part of it.

The word *humble*, like *humus*, comes from the word for *ground*, which of course is where we come from too, and also where we return.

The earth is our source, and our destination, our home in every sense.

And when Jesus tells a story about a seed in the earth, it is not just parable, it is also autobiography.

The God we so often accuse of taking us to heaven is the one the Bible repeatedly praises for honoring this earth enough to make God's home here.

Jesus, God's seed sown here, tells his followers in John's gospel that *unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

He says this, of course, to illuminate his death and resurrection, the faith in which we dare to rest, the wondrous mystery that saves us all, we know not how.

Because of him, we can have the courage to go to sleep, at night when our work is done, and at the end of our lives, when our work is done.

We need not poison the atmosphere with the energy emitting from machines keeping us alive.

We need not extend our war against our own mortality that ultimately undermines life.

Instead, in due season, we can fall into the earth and die...we can finally, faithfully, fully follow Jesus...in the confidence that the seed and the farmer are the same creation, and that our attentive God, that idiot farmer whose ways we cannot understand, will recognize our ripening and know exactly what to do, we know not how.