

Ring the Last Bell

7:00 am: Breakfast
and the clouds have come down
to hide Johnson's Mesa
Someone's stolen it! Vance
used to say---
and I'm almost alone on the wet planks
of the deck, except for five
or six half-conscious campers
puffy-eyed, their heads
already gone, hearts left standing
at the trailhead marked *home*

Counselors are conjuring
smiles, as they place each foot
closer to the hilltop
and the last meal;
it's safer that way—
a trickle can open a crack
in the dam enough to float two charter buses
and a 15 passenger church van through

This bell is clear, piercing
and unrelenting, my hand pulling
the rope I'm at the end of—
my ears ringing long after
the last swing of the clacker

There are these things that come
to shake us out of sleep
and make us rise;
vague dreams melting with the light
into real faces gathered in circles:
meals, campfires, prayers,
meetings, devotionals—
not geometry only—but hearts that curve and bend
to accommodate each other,

and my hand is on the rope
that calls me—calls us
both together and apart
but it's not my hand
that pulls the hours down into
minutes and seconds
or spins the seasons into months
or gives us only *time enough*

and not too much...
not too much...
so that lessons come
in gulps we can handle,
sweet like the spring
on Elk mountain—
pure and rare!

It's God who has stolen Johnson's Mesa
this morning and placed this cloud
over our heads, pelted
the mountains with rain,
confiscated our schedule
distracted our campers
turned our sermons inside-out
so His Word at the heart
is louder than ours...

Like a prankster,
He's foiled our plans.

Thank God, as the last bell rings
because He doesn't care
that it's the last bell
that it's time for camp to end
that we all have other things to do
and places to go...

God is that first year camper
who doesn't understand endings
who will refuse
to let us leave
who will not say
goodbye, see you next year!
He is clutching His journal,
His canteen, His lanyard,
His hands dirty
from playing with us...

Look at his eyes;
God won't let us go our separate
ways
just because some dumb old director rang the
bell.