

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Lib McGregor Simmons, Pastor
“The Slow Club”
Psalm 19
October 8, 2017

C.S. Lewis said of Psalm 19, “I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.” (1)

Each Tuesday morning, when your staff here at Davidson College Presbyterian gathers for our 10 a.m. weekly staff meeting, we take turns 9an opening reflection and prayer. It was our staff associate for youth Matt Wiggins’s turn last Tuesday, and he shared a You Tube video entitled “The Slow Club.”

In this video, Mark Yaconelli, a professional storyteller who co-founded the Center for Engaged Compassion, said, “I wish we were as attentive to the 10,000 miracles that we pass every day as we are to our phones: the beauty of the skies, babies with their faces so fresh from God, the warmth of friendship, the intimacy of family, good food to eat, coffee...but we hurry past them.”

After that introduction, he continued by telling the audience about his 4-year-old son Joseph. Mark was in the getting-ready-for-school hustle with Joseph and his 6-year-old brother Noah. Noah was getting with the program, but Joseph was having none of it. They rushed out the door, but Joseph stopped, “Dad,” he said, “look at this bark on the ground.”

“Come on, Joseph, let’s go,” said his dad.

“But Dad, look at this yogurt cup someone threw in the bushes.”

“Come on, Joseph, let’s go. We are going to be late, buddy.”

“But Dad, this yogurt cup would make a perfect pirate mug.”

You get the picture.

A few days later, the Yaconelli family was having dinner. Joseph said, “Guess what! I started a club today.”

“What kind of club is it?” the others asked.

“It’s called The Slow Club. I’m the president.”

“Are there any other kids in the club?”

“No, just me.”

“What do you do in The Slow Club?”

“We have two rules. No running. No hurrying.”

For the rest of the year, Joseph was on a mission to grow the membership of The Slow Club. He got his parents to help him draw up a charter. He asked everybody who came to their house if they wanted to be members of The Slow Club. No one joined. No one joined because they just couldn't agree to abide by the two rules of no running and no hurrying.

The next summer, Mark was helping to lead a summer camp. One day, Joseph said to Mark, “Dad, would you like a one-day pass to The Slow Club?”

Mark had to think about it! Finally, however, he agreed. Joseph took some crayons and created a one-day pass to The Slow Club for his dad. And just as he handed the Slow Club pass to his dad, the camp's lunch bell rang. And the teenaged campers started running from every direction toward the dining hall. Mark said, “Joseph, we have to get to lunch or we'll be at the back of the line!”

“Dad, don't you remember? You are in Slow Club now. No running. No hurrying. And I promise if you don't run and you don't hurry, you are going to notice stuff that all those other people didn't see.”

And here is what Mark said that they saw: two jackrabbits, some lupine beautiful flowers, some butterflies, some lizards sunning themselves on a rock.

When they finally made it to the lunch table, Joseph said, “Dad, tell Mom what you saw.”

And so Mark shared with her what he had seen that the other people hadn't seen...all because he took a one-day membership pass to Slow Club. Because he was in Slow Club, Joseph had enabled Mark “to recover something that I knew but had lost.” (2)

Perhaps we should give the Psalmist who penned the magnificent Psalm 19 the name *Joseph* since we don't know the Psalmist's actual name (or perhaps, for fun, even *Josephine*, since we don't know the Psalmist's gender either) because Psalm 19 is God's invitation to us to join the Slow Club and to recover something that we already know, but far too often forget...that there are signs of wonder all around us pointing to the truth that God is at work each and every day creating and recreating life and love.

Mark Yaconelli began his talk by pointing out the ways that our attention to our phones distracts us from seeing the wonder of God. As we come to worship today, I also am aware of how the violence, natural disaster, and tragedy that our nation and the world have been witnessing these past few weeks can also distract us from the wonder-saturated truth that God is at work each and every day creating and recreating life and love. The devastation wrought by hurricanes eventuating in terrible suffering for the citizens of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, other island nations in the Caribbean, Florida, and Texas, and now, it appears, in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, huge issues like climate change and an opioid epidemic of crisis proportions, the incomprehensible and senseless deaths and injuries in Las Vegas and the terrible addiction to guns that we in the United States can't seem to rehabilitate...layered one on top of the other, reality itself becomes a huge mountain too huge for our combined efforts to scale, much less a single individual, a mountain that blocks us from seeing, well, God.

And so, speaking to us who find ourselves in the midst of these and other weighty realities, the Psalmist writes, “one day tells its tale to another.”

In the poem that is Psalm 19, the sun—in the ancient Near East a symbol for order and justice⁽³⁾—is a storyteller. In the morning, the sun is a bridegroom running down the aisle toward his bride with anticipation and joy. The movement of the sun continues into midday and on into sunset when the celestial runner crosses the tape of the finish line.

And the next day and the next day and the next day...the movement of the sun across the sky from sunrise to sunset is repeated. As the hymn “Morning Has Broken” that we sing today says, it is God’s re-creation of a new day.

And the movement that is found in nature from sunrise to sunset continues in the second part of the poem which speaks of *Torah*.

The English translators make an unfortunate choice, I think, when they translate *Torah* as “law.” When we read, “the law of the LORD,” the eyes of our minds may go to the blazing finger of God in the movie “The Ten Commandments” blistering immutable “thou shalt nots” into tablets of stone in the presence of a quivering Charlton Heston.

But what this motion picture scene fails to convey is the sense of movement that is embodied in the word *Torah*. (4) *Torah* means “way” or “path.” Thus, the same God who has created the sun to move across the sky has created a way, a path in Scripture, Scripture that tells readers the stories of spiritual ancestors like the Israelites, the original Slow Club, because, you remember, they took 40 years to reach their destination, the Promised Land, Scripture that brings alive the person of Jesus who had no place to lay his head and was thus a person very much on the move, but never in such a hurry that they failed to notice the birds of the air who do not sow or reap or the lilies of the field who do not toil or spin or the leper by the side of the road in need of healing.

The slow, unhurried movement of Psalm 19 is from skies of creation to the divine instruction of Scripture to the worshiper, that is, to you and to me. (5)

And today it is an invitation to all who are weary of violence and saddened by senseless death and weighed down by a sense of helplessness in the face of it all. It is an invitation to join 4-year-old Joseph Yaconelli’s Slow Club, to soak in the poetry of Josephine the Psalmist, to recover something that deep down you know but may have lost in these trying days—the sense of wonder that leads to a trust that there is no act so awful, no tragedy so terrible which can prevent our God from re-creating a new day filled with life and love.

1. C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1986), 63.
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62_GqbfuOeY
3. Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101.
4. J. Clinton McCann, Jr. and James C. Howell, *Preaching on the Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 100.
5. Brueggemann and Bellinger, 101.