

31 Days of the Little Way: Being the last mom at pick-up

No one wants to be the last parent to pick up from after-school care.

I always feel like Ping, the duck who worries about being the last to climb on the boat. He knows the last duck gets a smack on the back. He hurries and rushes to get in line so he doesn't get smacked.

Knowing I am running late tonight, I hurry and worry and pray I'll make it on time. I imagine our children will be sad that I have taken so long. At least they are together, I think. It's my one consolation, though I still feel guilty.

There's no smack on the back for me as I pull into an empty parking lot, glancing at the clock yet again. But I still feel the burden of being last.



I could have left the office sooner, but I was trying to get some work finished so I didn't have to bring it home. In the end, I'm bringing it home anyway—which is fine. I do some of my best work at night after our children are asleep. But I could have left 20 minutes sooner and not been late.

I brace myself for disappointed children and harried after care staff who wonder why I take so long.

Then as I climb out of the car, I see that someone is holding the school door open for me. It's the kind man who is in charge of cleaning and maintaining the facilities at the school. He knows what time it is—he's ending his shift—yet he greets me as cheerfully as he always does.

I smile back at him, wondering how many people he must interact with every day. How does he keep smiling through all that he handles? He must have so many emergencies to deal with, all of them messy, none of them easy. Yet here he is at the end of his work day, offering warm, welcoming words as he holds the door for me.

Inside, the after care employees—who have to be tired from their hours with the students—are smiling too, asking whether my children want to order pizza for an afternoon next week, joking with me, and kindly not pointing out that I have arrived with two minutes to spare.

And there are my children, my world, sitting calmly at a table, not anxious, not worried, just chatting with each other and eating.

"Look, Mama!" our younger son says. "We get to eat out of our lunchboxes because we are the last ones here!"

So here they are, eating their lunchbox leftovers, happy as can be, perfectly content,

enjoying a treat because I am late.

We gather their things and say thank you, goodbye, see you tomorrow, and head out to the car. Because we are the only ones leaving, there's an unusual calm to our departure. And because my boys have just had a snack, they're in a good mood, not the slightly-cranky, hungry-for-dinner mode we are often in at pick-up.

I realize it's smoother and easier than when I pick up on time.

We make a stop on our way home and we glance up at the clouds.



"Wow," I say. "How does God make a sky like that?"

"Well," our older son says, matter-of-factly, "He's God."

He's right. It's that simple. God can make a dramatic evening sky from the gray rainy one that started our day. He can take my scattered, rushed evening and replace it with a sense of calm and peace.

