**Church on the Kuskokwim River, Alaska**

Jackie McManus

A congregation of villagers,

 teachers, mothers, fathers,

and a trellis of kids

packed into an open skiff

to go to Kwethluk to sing.

At five o’clock,

 after two church services

and three meals,

we piled back in the boat

just in time

for thunder, rain, lightning.

 Showers

in slow waves across the delta.

We could see to the horizon

in all directions from Kwethluk:

Bottoms of clouds in the northwest,

 commandment black,

with their edge and top

the shade of pale stone.

The sun sank further until

the wind-whipped sky became

 an uncertain hue

like low bush cranberries

pulled by a lone cloud

opposite the sun resurrecting pink,

the color of broken ice

 and trout.

A maelstrom of light

fell over the boat

from clouds ridiculously vivid,

and a preaching rainbow pillar

 shot

straight into its black base.

The weight of the sky lifted

 as the villagers navigated a high prayer

of waves and wind

 at forty miles an hour,

the speed of holy,

pelted and drenched and home by ten thirty,

baptized to the bone.