Sunrise at Zephyr Point

Bob Hewes BCC

Tall peaks stand sentry over the calm water of Lake Tahoe. As the light of dawn filters through the night sky, only their silhouettes are visible as if they were a painted background for an old movie. The light gradually increases, gracing the South Shore peaks with a halo of pink, while the North Shore continues to hide in the shadows.

I am alone at the shoreline—or so it seems. Even the gentle breeze makes no sound. It is a time of silent wonder and reflection. Am I a witness to this event or a participant? It hardly seems to matter. The mountains were here long before humans occupied this land and will be here long after I am gone. Yet each day is a new beginning, a metaphor for creation, and I am involved in this one.

Other forms of life begin to emerge. A duck glides silently through the water, unaware of my presence. A chipmunk scrambles across a patch of earth to the pine tree of her choice, stopping only a moment to see whom this intruder might be. Sensing no threat, and perhaps my benevolent thoughts, she runs up the tree. The stark honk of two Canada geese flying low over the water comes as a startling surprise. They glide past and gracefully land only a few feet away.

The lake remains a place of peace and tranquility even as the first speedboat comes into view, its motor only a soft hum in the distance. The water skier being towed seems to pass by in slow motion, and I wonder how he can stay on top of the water. Perhaps his speed is an illusion.

Is the serenity of this hour also an illusion? The forest is a place both of opportunity and of danger; creatures hunt for food while trying to avoid becoming food for someone else. The mountains were created by the violent collision and pulling apart of tectonic plates beneath the earth’s surface, a process that still is evolving. Yet peace also is present here within the continuum of daily experience. It is not found only in retreat or escape.

Could this be the essence of the metaphor shaping in my mind? Work is never without meaning if it is done in the service of life. Illness, injury and emotional strain will always be among us, but so will peace and healing.

Once in a while, as I visit a patient, a sunrise moment comes to us unexpectedly. Am I a witness or a participant? All that seems to matter is the message that motivates me. Before I can see the sun, I can see its light.

The Reverend Bob Hewes MDiv MA BCC serves as staff chaplain at Saint Agnes Medical Center, Fresno, CA. He is endorsed by the Presbyterian Church USA. This reflection was written during an artists’ retreat at Zephyr Point, a Presbyterian conference center at Lake Tahoe.

rjhewes@sbcglobal.net