

ONE

Sunrise in Galilee

“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”-- John 6:40

LAST NIGHT, just as the Sabbath ended, a great storm whipped across the Sea of Galilee. I stood at the window in my room, watching, the lightning flash and the wind-whipped waves beat on the shore.

I rose early this morning and walked the quiet path through the kibbutz where I spent the night. The slight rosy hue in the eastern sky, outlining the mountains of the misty Golan Heights on the far side of the lake, hinted at dawn’s approach. I found this big rock overlooking the water where I could sit and await the sunrise. The water is mirror calm, as though last night’s storm never happened.

The quiet of dawn draws my thoughts to God. The night creatures had hushed their soft noises in anticipation of the sun’s arrival -- much as a theatre audience grows silent just before the curtain is pulled. The only sound was the gentle lapping of the water on the rocks along the shore. Jesus came here early one morning, many years ago. He, too, sat on one of these rocks contemplating what his heavenly Father had revealed to him. God wanted Jesus to walk to Jerusalem, a trip he had made several times since leaving his carpenter’s job three years earlier.

The rigors of the 90-mile journey did not trouble Jesus -- but the purpose did. There, in Jerusalem, he was going to die a horrible death. Yet, even as he sat here and shuddered at the thought of being nailed to a cross, God’s Son did not shirk from the call. He knew his father was in control. Jesus also knew, because God had told him, that he would come out of the tomb three days later -- opening the door to eternal life for all who believed in him.

My dawn reverie makes me think of death. It is coming to all of us. Yet because of Jesus’ death, there is a resurrection for us, too. My heart fills with praise as I sit quietly, looking out over the calm water of this special place.

The ancient Jews called this the Sea of Kinneret from the Hebrew word *kinor*, meaning “harp” - the shape of the lake. The Galilee is more than 600 feet below sea level. Being here this Sunday morning, surrounded by the mountains, is like sitting in the bottom of a giant teacup as the sun rises over the edge.

Sunrise came gradually. The eastern sky began to blush as a bride’s cheeks might color in anticipation of the arrival of her new husband.

First the black turned to pink, which was then mixed with streaks of violet changing to light blue. Then the entire horizon, in an instant, was filled with flashes of rose and magenta. Rays of pink and red reflected off the sparse, low clouds which huddled next to the eastern hilltops, as though trying to keep warm in the pre-dawn chill. Finally, just when I was able to pinpoint exactly where the sun would first appear, there was an explosion of brilliant orange and red, heralding the beginning of this new day in Israel.

I sat in silence as the scarlet ball pushed back the darkness, rising like a giant bubble of light out of the indigo night. I could almost see it ascend, gathering speed as it emerged over the dark shadows of the Syrian mountains. Suddenly, it was no longer night -- but day.

Now the light revealed the seaside city of Tiberias to my right. Around the bend of the shoreline to the north, the slanting fields on the sides of the Mount of Beatitudes were awash in the morning sun. Tall eucalyptus trees streaked the slopes with shadows.

How many times, I wonder, did the Son of God sit at this very place and see this same, magnificent sight--watching the sun he created reflect off the sparkling blue water of the Sea of Galilee? Unlike us, Jesus knew his future. Early one morning, sitting near this place, Matthew says "he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'" (Matthew 20:17-19).

The concept was so foreign that the disciples could not understand or even receive it. But Jesus knew--and yet he never flinched from the future. Why? Because he had faith to believe his heavenly Father was in control

Two fishing boats, nets piled high in the stern, slowly make their way across the sun's brilliant path sparkling on the surface of the water. They've been out all night, dragging their nets, just as the disciples did 2000 years ago. Their wake ripples the path of sunbeams as they chug toward the tiny fishing kibbutz of En Gev on the far side of the lake.

It's springtime here in Galilee. Thanks to the winter rains, the low mountains are awash in vivid color--robed in "the brilliant garb of spring." The field next to me is spotted with vibrant tones--scarlet poppies and yellow and purple blossoms are spread like a colorful quilt over all the pastures of the upper Galilee. Nature is dressing herself to prepare for earth's greatest celebration -- Easter Sunday.

In three days Christians around the world will begin the celebration of Lent. The term "lent" comes from an old English word meaning spring -- referring to the brightening or lengthening of the days. This wonderful time of year encompasses the forty weekdays before Easter as a time of repentance and fasting. Ash Wednesday begins this period which symbolizes the forty days Jesus spent in the Judean wilderness following his baptism.

Today is the Sunday the ancient church fathers called *Quinquagesima*, which heralds the fifty days before Easter. In the liturgy *quinquagesima* is the first word of the prayer of introduction--called the *introit*. The beginning of the beginning of resurrected life. I hope my Lenten visit to the Holy Land will help me understand what Jesus meant when he said, "Because I live, you shall live also."