

“In old age, wandering on a trail of beauty,  
lively, may I walk.  
In old age, wandering on a trail of beauty,  
living again, may I walk.”

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Very shortly before Martin died, he spent time in Monument Valley, walking “lively” on a trail of beauty. Martin loved Monument Valley – Navajoland -- the rocks and the mesas, the brilliant blue skies and the generous horizons of this part of the world. It was where he could see more clearly that his life was one of walking in beauty.

But of course beauty is more than skin deep. Both for Martin and the Navajo the concept of beauty encompasses harmony, wholeness, and balance. It describes a right relationship with others and Other.

So for Martin, walking in beauty took place in many venues and played out in many modes.

He found beauty in walking with Anne for more than 46 years. He created beauty by fathering Kate and Peter. He rejoiced in the beauty of grandchildren: Christopher, Sarah and Nick and Jourdan and Jared. Martin’s sister Genie knew him in yet another way (and by another name); he was Pooh who laughed with beauty.

By profession, Martin was an illuminator of beauty. (This may be an unusual characterization of a physical chemist’s job, but I think it is how Martin went about it.) He wasn’t content with reducing the complexity of creation to sets of equations. He wanted to know how the small puzzle pieces he (and others) discovered, fit in the big picture.

Nor was he content with keeping the glorious beauty he saw to himself. He wanted companions to share his enthusiasm. And if they didn’t quite know how to go about appreciating the world, he was there to equip them. For most of his life he taught college students. More recently he was thrilled to tutor younger students at Mark Twain through the Wise Men and Women mentoring program. It didn’t matter how old his fellow pilgrims were. Nor, for that matter, how educated they were. The Men’s group here at Canterbury all have educational backgrounds comparable to Martin’s. The students at Mark Twain haven’t yet had the time to achieve that level of skill. What characterized the people he learned with was that in some way they wanted to explore the mystery of the universe. They were all part of the beauty.

Martin was equally inclusive when it came to areas of learning. His own foundations in chemistry and science did not preclude a serious interest in religion and myth, philosophy and poetry. What mattered was that the subject of study helped to uncover beauty.

A few moments ago, we heard Peter read a portion of the Genesis creation account. It's not one of the suggested lections for funerals in the Episcopal Church. But it represents both that big picture that Martin was trying to fill in and the delight that he took in creation itself – the “beautiful joyful birds”, the grasshoppers about his feet. I can almost hear Martin's voice echoing the approval of the God in whose image he was made. “So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.” So did Martin.

This passage was perfect for Martin, except.... that in most translations humanity was to “dominate” or “rule over” creation. Scholars claim that there is no intention to give the world over to mankind to do whatever man wanted; rather humanity's relation to the rest of creation is to be one of stewardship. But the words have been misused and distorted. And they certainly wouldn't have been consistent with Martin's attitude. In fact, the Acoma quotation on the front cover of your bulletins represents Martin's desire to be light-footed as he walked in beauty.

All of this is to explain the use of the word “mastery”, which a Jewish translation pointed to. It's not quite as “heavy” with power as some other words. At the same time it captures, in another sense, Martin's propensity to “master” knowledge and craft.

Martin's life may have “finished in beauty”. But as Christians, we believe that God continues to love what he has created, even beyond death. We who are celebrating Martin's life today are also rejoicing in the belief that Martin still walks in beauty. “In old age...living again” he walks. And living again, Martin has come face to face with the one who created him and now says to Martin, “Indeed. It is very good!”  
Amen.

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