



SIEBENQUELL

For My Friend



Isn't it wonderful when in spring you can observe how the birds start to build their nests? With what dedication they fly busily back and forth, with all kinds of building material in their little beaks. They create true works of art. I am moved every year anew and the rhythm of nature calms me. So I enjoy the singing of birds and early in the morning it is often the first thing I hear. I still remember my childhood days, how it was very special for me when I discovered a bird's nest. Quietly, I would creep up and listen to see if any little birds had hatched from the eggs, calling for their parents and stretching their necks upward. I was careful not to get too close so as not to scare the birds, so I often climbed on the opposite side, at the height of the nest, and kept a distant lookout, rejoicing when I saw or heard something. Empty and abandoned nests made me sad, although the nest itself, nourished my longing for security, warmth and protection. The birds' nests implied something light and yet stable, an unspeakably important dwelling place, for a certain time.

But what if the building of the nest does not want to succeed? What if the nest does not find a foothold?

A few weeks ago, I experienced this for myself:

For a good many years, a good friend told me, redstarts built a nest in a small niche next to her front door. It is always a great joy for her when she notices in the springtime that the little songbirds start building their nests again. She recognizes it by the fact that there are always small branches and moss on the ground outside her front door. It is a very touching, even reassuring feeling for her and she immediately tells her whole family when the birds are back. She tells her mother, who has always lived in the house and has done so for more than eighty years, her husband, her grown children and especially her grandchildren. In silence she still tells her father, who died years ago, yet who, she thought quietly to herself, if not he, knew how much she loved the birds, as well as the house.

Whenever she stepped out of the front door, she kept a watchful eye out for the birds. Little by little the nest grew and got a foothold in the small niche. Then there was the busy flying back and forth of the pair of birds. If you stood on a bench opposite the niche, you could soon spot the little eggs. A while later the little birds chirped and, full of hunger, they called for their parents. These constantly and alternately brought food and satisfied the hunger of their offspring.

It was wonderful, as my friend told me about it. When I heard her speak like that, I felt a deep longing, a longing to be protected, to feel safe and to be loved. Who does not know this longing?

But this year, it was different at my friend's house.

She told me that the birds did not find a foothold for the construction of the nest. Constantly she found the building material, laboriously brought by the birds, lying on the ground. It was a sad sight.

One morning, my friend was standing with her mother in front of the house door and they looked into the empty niche.

The mother looked at my friend and asked, »Can't you build a nest for the birds?«

Annoyed, my friend told me, she answered her mother:

»No, I can't build a nest for the birds! Nature goes its way, if the birds can't find a foothold, for their nest, then I can't, mustn't and won't intervene. They must really build their nests themselves.«

My friend admitted to me that she herself was very surprised about her angry, loud and forthright response towards her mother.

However, my friend could not get her mother's question out of her head. Something touched her very much. Perhaps it was her mother's confidence that she could build a nest. Or was it rather the question that grew in her: »Can, may and should I build a nest? or: What is my part in this story and what is my creative space?« Thus, the considerations of my friend, who tried to interpret all this from the perspective of her whole life.

Yes, she told herself, she was capable of giving everything to build a nest, figuratively speaking. But wasn't her time for nest-building over? More questions arose in her: »What does the image of building a nest and the image of building a nest for others stand for?«

The question of nest-building at her childhood home was very much on my friend's mind.

So much so that she told me about it while on a walk.

I would describe my friend as a very devout woman who has wonderful abilities to interpret the metaphors and images of Bible stories and spell them out for life. She herself would probably say: It works, more or less, but I cannot stop attending to these stories. She often describes herself, with a grateful heart, as a very rich woman, but her abundance also often challenges her and saps her strength.

So too, as she perceives this seemingly everyday question of her mother, takes it up and takes it into her life.

Truly an abundance, isn't it?

A few days after her mother's question, my friend looked once more at the almost empty niche at her house. In the tree, opposite the house, she saw two redstarts with building material for the nest in their beaks. She felt as if the birds were waiting for my friend to leave.

Then my friend had an idea: a small railing could give the niche some support for nest-building. She fashioned a narrow ledge out of strong cardboard and fitted it into the niche.

»This could work«, she told herself. »I can provide a foothold, but I cannot, must not, and will not build the nest for the birds. Just as I cannot, may not and will not build my nest for my adult children who will become parents themselves. But who says I can't do my part, if my strength allows it.«

After my friend told me this, I asked her: »What gives you strength, or what do you base it on? What gives you stability in life?«

She smiled and said: »Sometimes I succeed more and sometimes less, but I cannot, will not and must not stop believing in the One who is like a father and a mother and whose creatures we all are. I cannot, will not, and must not stop following my deepest heart's longing; the longing and truth that we are all sheltered, protected, and loved. I saw this longing flash briefly in my mother's eyes when she asked me, 'Could you build the nest?' «

Then she took me by the hand and showed me the niche at her house.

We were very still and I saw a wonderful bird's nest, in the alcove of the house, with young birds inside. What a wonderful sight!

In the evening, when I was back at my house, I picked up my Psalm book by Huub Oosterhuis. Inspired by all the thoughts and the story of my friend, I found the Psalm I was looking for:

The magnificent house,
which stands there, on the green hill,
broad wings, shady verandas,
high windows, deep rooms,
this house of yours,
where everything is welcome, where everything lives -
the sparrows may join the table
the swallow builds her nest under the gutter-
I am one of her young.
Restless is my heart, impetuously have I

longed for this place.
People, wherever born,
don't know what impels them,
are on their way to you.
Across the empty land
over dark waters, through forests,
over the mountain ridge, over the peak
they go blindly.
And then one day
they stand there. May we stay? You may.
They pitch tents
among your cedars, under your oaks,
stretched out in the tall grass.
quite blissful.
Better one day close by you
Than a thousand far from you,
Better one than a thousand far away from you.
(Psalm 84 according to Huub Oosterhuis)

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Vallendar, June 3^d, 2021