



SIEBENQUELL

»Let me sing for my beloved a love song« (Part I)



In Isaiah 5, 1-7, the prophet sings a lovely song. It is a ballad to a vineyard owner, apparently a good friend of the prophet. At the end of the text, the prophet reveals that this friend is God and that the vineyard is the House of Israel.

It is not hard to recognise, that we are dealing with a text about relationships. Step by step Isaiah moves through the phases of this relationship, from hope to disappointment, then to radical actions that flow from that disappointment.

Here we have arrived at a topic that we would prefer to avoid, namely, how do we deal with relationships that no longer bear fruit and will never do so in the future? The prophet allows us to look at something that we do

not gladly wish it admit and therefore simply bury in silence. He admits that there are in fact relationships, which cannot be saved.

Each one of us has a vineyard. The vineyard is the image for our relationships with family and friends. And we know the first phase which Isaiah describes, namely, the great effort to build up something beautiful, connected with the hope that from this something fruitful will grow for the future. We need only consider the time, effort energy and loving attention that we invests in our relationships, and the image comes to life.

For this vineyard, for this relationship, the owner invests a great deal of effort. He spends time finding the right place, a fertile hill. Everything that is not beneficial for fruitfulness is removed, for he dug it up and cleared it of stones. He invests the finest that he has to offer and plants the vineyards with the choicest vines. He expresses his hope for a fruitful future in that he builds a watchtower and digs out a wine vat. The vineyard is to be something lasting.

We have done the same thing when we have built our vineyards (our relationships). We gave thought to where and with whom we will build a future, be it in the community, in our ministries or in our personal friendships. We have removed obstacles, and were ready to work on ourselves and to change what was needed. We have invested ourselves so that our relationships have a chance. We have invested the very best, shown ourselves from the best side and brought what is most noble in us to bear. And we have expressed the hope, that all this effort would in the future bring forth something sweet, and fruitful and valuable. We always hope that the relationships which we nurture and foster will be something lasting.

But we know the second phase as well. The disappointment of the owner in the song of the prophet is palpable. After all this effort the vineyard has brought forth only wild grapes (too sour to eat or use for wine making).

Yet, the owner remains highly self-critical and poses to himself three important questions.

1. What could I have done that I did not do?
2. Why did I hope for good grapes?
3. Why did my vineyard bring forth only wild grapes?

When our relationships within the congregation do not function properly, when friendship and community life shatter, then we ask these questions, and they come naturally to us. We do this, because our relationships mean a lot to us.

How often have we asked the questions, individually, in leadership and in our formation teams?

1. What could we have done that we did not do?
2. Why did we hope?
3. Why did our hope not attain fulfilment?

It is good that we do so. That speaks highly of us. We should not prematurely lay the fault with the vineyard (the relationship). We must ask ourselves: Have we really done everything within our power? Were our expectations realistic? We need to take an exact look in order to figure out where and why things went wrong.

However, we should also do so as the owner of the vineyard did, namely, seeking the feedback of others. In order not to fall into self-illusion, we should, like the owner, call on others to look at the relationship with us.
»And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.«

Then, if it was our fault, we need to do something about it.

However: what happens if it was not our fault?

What happens if there was no lack of commitment on our part?

What happens if it was not a matter of our flawed behaviour or attitude?

To be continued.

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