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He will give them… beauty for ashes (Is 61:3)

Dear Friends,

I've been thinking about BEAUTY recently. Perhaps it's because of where we live. Perhaps it's because God created us with a profound need for beauty – and I'm beginning to realise that my spirit needs a certain amount of beauty to thrive and soar. And God delights to meet that need.

Yesterday, the window sills arrived. I know it doesn't sound like much, but they're the first items of BEAUTY in the Prayer House. Up to now, everything has been functional – walls, concrete, steel, roof, windows – but these window sills are BEAUTIFUL. They're from a single slab of granite that's been cut and shaped and polished.

For a long time now, we've felt that the Prayer House will be Prayer HOME. I know that doesn't translate well into some languages, because house and home can be the same word, but a home is so much more than a house.

A home is where you live with your family, where you eat, have fellowship, spend time together. It's a place that's totally unique to you. It has your choice of furniture, your pictures on the wall. So, the Father wants a HOME – a place where He can spend time with His family.

We've also felt that the Prayer House should be a place of BEAUTY – to reflect HIS BEAUTY – in contrast to the dark ugliness of the death camp in front of it.

Auschwitz-Birkenau is a place of contrasts – of contrasting landscapes, contrasting agendas and contrasting emotions. On the one side we see the ugliness of the camp, the death and destruction, the woundedness, the intense pain and the sorrow. And we clearly see the agenda of God's enemy.

But on the other side we see the agenda of Heaven, the beauty of redemption, healing, His immense love and complete joy in the Father's Presence – for***"In Your Presence is FULLNESS of joy"*** (Ps 16).

It's an amazing thing, but in the past 2 months, we've had song birds flying around inside the Prayer House. Four of them. We have no idea how they got in – probably between the roof and the walls because that part is not yet finished. They're nesting over one of the bedrooms, above the fibreglass wool in the ceiling. We can hear the baby birds chirping ever so loudly, asking their Mummy to give them food. In the evenings, we can see Mummy or Daddy bird look at us from above the fibreglass…

In Psalm 84, we read,***"Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young — NEAR YOUR ALTARS, O Lord of hosts."***

Earlier this week, in the evening, after most of the visitors had gone, we walked into the camp and were amazed at the birds singing worship songs to their Creator. So many birds. Such a beautiful sound. And at the back of the camp we saw a stork and a bit later a deer with her young. Such beauty.

As I'm writing this – I've just received a voice message from someone who visited us 2-3 months ago. I think this is amazing timing… He said that as he was walking through Auschwitz-Birkenau, he felt this "crazy peace", and as he looked at the grass and heard the SONG BIRDS, he heard a part of Isaiah 35. This is what he heard:

Springs will burst forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the wasteland. The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived. And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness…

In the last few minutes I've received an email, called "Beautiful things". It's about God transforming ugliness into beauty. I wonder if God is saying something…???

This is the heart of the Father. Isaiah 61, which Jesus quoted at the start of His ministry, ***"He has sent Me… to give them BEAUTY for ASHES, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."***



Window sills fitted this week

For the last 3 weeks, there's been a constant stream of activity in the house. On some days we've had more than 10 people working – mostly electricians – but also plumbers and those who fitted the window sills.

The electricians finished a couple of days ago and they've done an incredible job. We received so much favour from them. They went out of their way to help us and did so much more than we expected. They were a real gift from the Lord!

They installed more than 2 km of power cable, plus several hundred meters of various types of data cables, which are now all buried neatly inside the walls.



The prayer room with cables in the walls.



Mark and Karen (our friend and fellow worker) on the ground floor with some plumbing supplies!



One of the plumbers laying pipes.

After the electricians it's the plumbers. They'll be here for the next 2 weeks and after that, in the middle of June, we've organised the plasterers to come. That will last 3 weeks and in July the electricians and the plumbers will come back to do the next phase of the work. It's going to be busy…

With love and blessings,
Mark & Cathy

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