

## **Building a Nest**

Homily for the Memorial Service of Carl H. Gmoser

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Asbury UMC

Saturday, May 2, 2009

I looked out my bedroom window recently and saw a pair of mourning doves building a nest in the tree that was only ten or fifteen feet away from my window. One of the birds was gathering the nesting material, while the other was doing the actual construction. The dove that was collecting the materials was very particular about its work: each time it returned with a single, straight, thin stick, always the same length, about four inches long, and always perfectly straight – no crooked sticks in this nest. It was a very simple nest they were building, small and rather flat.

I opened the window at one point, and I said to them, “I have seen more impressive nests in National Geographic.” That did not seem to bother them at all. They went right on building the nest their own way.

A few days later there was a storm with strong winds. During the storm I looked out the window, wondering how the nest was holding up. The wind was bending the trunk of the slender tree and whipping the branches all around. But the nest was still there, holding up perfectly well.

After that I was sorry about what I said to those birds. The next time I saw them, I told them that I had changed my opinion of their nest after seeing it holding up so well in the storm.

I would like to say a few words today about a pair of birds who built a nest that has proved to be a very good and sturdy nest indeed. Their nest was built with a set of definite convictions and commitments: a commitment to family, an embrace of creativity, a love for exploration, a commitment to service, abundant hospitality, and an astounding capacity for plain hard work. These were the sticks they wove together in a process of true partnership and in a marriage of profound mutual love and respect.

The two birds I speak of, like mourning doves, mated for life. They brought forth out of their nest a remarkable brood of offspring. This nest was so effectively built and so well maintained that it stood up through many decades and many storms. The nest they built together was a strong and safe platform on which their children grew and thrived, and from which they explored the world as their curiosities and their passions moved them. It has also been an expandable nest – enlarging to provide a loving welcome to the brides and children of those three sons and to a multitude of friends.

In ordinary arithmetic  $1 + 1 = 2$ . However, in the mathematics of relationships, when

human lives are joined together, one plus one does not equal two. The right 1 plus the right 1 may equal 5 or 10 or 100. So it has been with this pair; together they have been more than two. They blended their energy and creativity in ways that yielded deep personal satisfaction, while at the same time their synergy has enabled them to be extraordinary teachers and mentors, leaders and guides for so many others. They have accomplished amazing things; they have made extraordinary contributions to their community, to their church, and to the arts. They have been builders and doers.

The metaphor may be thoroughly exhausted by now, but I would say one more thing about the nest built by this remarkable duo: it is still here as strong as ever. One of the two principal architects and builders of the nest is gone from us, but his very being and the principles that were embodied in his life, in his marriage, in his fathering and grandfathering, and in his vocation and avocations, are embedded in everything he has left behind.

And the love with which he loved his mate and his family, his friends, his work and his church is circulating around in this very moment, even here in this place, and it will continue to circulate invisibly down the stream of time.

We have already heard many things about Carl Gmoser today, and we will be hearing more, including a speech by Carl, himself. I can't recall the last time I heard someone provide a speech for their own memorial service. We are using many words today to remember and to describe a man of few words.

I will leave it to Carl – in his own words – and to his son, Andrew, in his words to complete the reminiscences of this wise and gentle man.

I will simply say to Lu and to your sons and your daughters-in-law, to your grandchildren, to Carl's brother and to all your family that there is a very sweet feeling in my heart when I see Carl's face and recall his voice. I know that I am one of so many who can say that. Whatever we may say of Carl's qualities and accomplishments, the simplest and most sacred thing we know is the way he touched our hearts, and touches them even now.

As we see Carl's face and hear his voice we are simply grateful and blessed.

For this we give thanks to God.

We are so grateful for the gift of Carl's life. And we offer his life back to God for whatever mysterious purposes God now has in store for this gentle soul we all love.

Grace and peace to you, Carl, our brother.

And grace and peace to each of you.