

Rebuild, Renew, Rejoice!

God Promised Us a Rainbow

In Genesis 9:12-17, God promised us a rainbow to indicate that the rains will never again kill every living creature on earth. That was His covenant with Noah. Yet, when a disaster of the magnitude of Katrina happens and so many of God's children are killed, or are permanently psychologically damaged, I can't help but ask, "*God, where is the rainbow?*"

Ever since Katrina hit the Gulf coast, I had a need deep in my soul to go to the Gulf coast to help. I didn't know what I would do, but I knew I had to go. So, I contacted the person listed on the ELCA website, gathered a team together from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, and the next thing you knew, the five of us were off to Biloxi, MS. As we entered Mississippi from Alabama through the driving rains of Hurricane Rita, the devastation began to present itself—trees snapped in two like chopsticks, hundred year-old live oak trees pulled from the ground as if by some giant weeding his garden. Huge highway signs were bent in two, or just gone...the damage was horrible, and I asked again in despair, "*God, where is the rainbow?*"

We saw large sailboats tossed aside as if a child had discarded them after play was done. A large chunk of I-10 over the river was completely washed away, and our path into Biloxi was altered due to a bridge that was there no more...still no rainbow.

We were welcomed to Bethel Lutheran Church, our home for the next several days, with open arms and calls to grab buckets! The roof was leaking again. Large portions had been blown away during the hurricane and the tarps covering the holes were now blowing in the winds from Rita. So, as we strategically place buckets under the leaks, others went up on the roof to nail down the tarp. Welcome to Biloxi! That evening after dinner and devotions, Judy, Pastor Jerry's wife, made us cry with her stories of the people of Biloxi, the devastation that they were living through, and how badly they needed our help. I was so glad I had come.

Later that evening, I asked Corinne what she thought about God promising us rainbow, and how I couldn't see one. She suggested that perhaps *we* were the rainbow. Something to contemplate.

Walking with Corinne through Biloxi Sunday morning, we were in awe of the remnants of Katrina. The degree of devastation would have been unimaginable if we hadn't been experiencing and photographing it with our own eyes. Curiously, the same thought came to both of us—were we in bad taste photographing the misfortune of others? Perhaps though, these photos will allow us to document our observations and allow us to raise money to continue to help these people.

An amazing observation—all the trees that were completely stripped of their vegetation by Katrina are leafing out again. The inpatients and even some azaleas are blooming again. Everywhere trees and plants think it's Spring again. Perhaps this is God's signal that Biloxi will be reborn...but is it a rainbow?

The rest of the week was spent deconstructing homes, all the way down to the studs in order that the houses and lives in them could be reborn. Or working in the "store," making sure that these poor people who had lost everything had food to make a meal for their family, water to drink, laundry soap, and bleach, lots of bleach. We went through truckloads of donated products, yet we always ran out. Several times I felt the need to go to the store and buy laundry soap because we never had enough for everyone. It really hurt to see the supplies running low and know that I just couldn't keep going out and personally buying more. But the gratitude on the faces of the peoples who came in the door, the heartfelt hugs from people I'll never see again, the sunshine in a child's face when you handed him or her a soft teddy bear—overwhelming warmth to my soul.

We left Mississippi on Thursday after driving around Biloxi to see and photograph more of the remnants of Katrina. Casino barges blown up on the beach, Jefferson Davis' home, Beauvoir, well, not a pretty sight any longer, a Waffle House restaurant that was nothing more than a tangle of metal. We saw and experienced first hand the force of nature and it made us sad.

As we were driving up the highway at the end of a week we'll never forget, we remembered working harder than we ever have, and touching more lives that we probably realized. We remembered a week that has truly changed us, and talked, not surprisingly, of our plans to return to Biloxi.

And as we drive up the highway toward Atlanta I looked up, and there in the clouds, was God's promised rainbow.