

This is what I learned in New Orleans.

We are the body of Christ. I don't mean that figuratively. I mean it literally.

God lives in each of us, most of the time buried under so many layers of daily worry. But when we witness people being brave and strong in the face of suffering, we are in the presence of God. Love that beautiful, that raw, and unmistakable stripes us bare and leaves us overwhelmed - with sadness, and joy, and love – all at once.

In that moment we see God revealed right then, right there, before us. And afterwards we are not the same. We catch the light. It fills us. It overflows. It burns in us like a constant reminder, a constant strength that we can call up at any minute and remember.

New Orleans was a week of those moments, and I am not the same person for having been there.

I helped build houses in New Orleans. But even more I helped build people. The people I met there each had a devastating story of loss greater than any of us can take in. Losses of homes, and people, and belongings, and jobs, and cars, and neighbors, and schools, and friends, and churches. Mostly losses of security and hope.

There was Vera, a 70 year old woman whose 7th ward house was destroyed with everything she owned. After spending 2 years living with 9 kids and grandkids in a 2 bedroom apartment, Vera is looking forward to moving back into the house her family has lived in for generations.

And Andreas, an unskilled 45 year old hotel worker, who watched a dead body float outside his 2nd floor apartment for 9 days before being forcibly evacuated to Greenville, NC. With limited education and no contacts outside New Orleans, Andreas has returned to his city and is unable to comprehend how 2 years later so little of the city has been rebuilt.

But those people showed me the light of God. They have come back to New Orleans. They are rebuilding – all that stuff and themselves.

Every day they get up and put themselves to work making their lives, and by extension their community whole again.

Sometimes they speak in anger about being abandoned by people who should have helped them - insurance companies and governments. But they are never angry with God. Instead they are grateful. Can you imagine.. they are GRATEFUL. They tell stories about who was kind to them when they were evacuated, about how lucky they were to survive, about how keenly aware they are of their blessings.

Those people laughed. They told stories. They had a normalcy and resilience that was incomprehensible to me. And they hugged me and looked me in the eye when they thanked me for coming to their city, for doing my small part... for being the body of Christ with them.

But I owe them my thanks. They showed me the light of God in themselves. They gave me their light and I am overflowing with it. Together we are the body of Christ and I am so very blessed to have had a chance to be with them and to have shared in rebuilding one another.

Barbara P