



November 2009

Reflections from Ken

Like clockwork, each day last week began the same way for Per, Jon, Dan and myself. We awoke early, ate a little breakfast, loaded our rental pickup full of dry walling tools and headed for the job site: Linda Joseph's home in New Orleans' Eighth Ward, a short block from the infamous Ninth Ward, one of the areas most damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

Reflections on God's Grace: From New Orleans to Maine

An electrician had rewired the home prior to our arrival and our task was to simply install drywall throughout the house; additionally, we were asked to install a pull-down staircase leading to the attic. Despite several minor injuries, a lack of electricity and a house without a single square corner or plumb line, we managed to finish the job. And we all returned with a deeper understanding of the adage, "Measure twice, cut once."

During our time in New Orleans we visited several different neighborhoods, some damaged from Katrina, others relatively untouched. Observing the overall landscape in this way gave me pause for reflection. In each neighborhood fully rehabilitated homes exist adjacent to severely damaged homes. Some streets have more empty homes than occupied homes; still others contain rows of

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Reflections from Per

In white letters on the back of the red shirt given to us by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New Orleans it reads, "I like a lot of places, but I like New Orleans better." Bob Dylan

Having now been to New Orleans twice to help with the recovery from Katrina, I can understand why this quote expresses the love that many have for New Orleans. As we worked and wandered the city, we saw a lot of devastation, and also a lot of beauty. From the gloriously varied and intricate architecture of the French Quarter, to the serene beauty of the above ground cemeteries; from the unique colors that homes are painted, to the red roses worked in iron on the porch next door to the house we worked on; from the music that gives life to Frenchman's Street, to the glorious costumes of the Mardi Gras Indians, beauty is rarely far away in New Orleans.



There's beauty even in drywall dust



Jon, Dan, Per, and Ken with Linda (homeowner), her granddaughter, and son

Yet, so often we did not see the beauty around us in the midst of the remnants left by Hurricane Katrina. It was all too easy to see only the vacant houses with roofs falling in, the empty lots with overly long weeds, the boarded up businesses. But filling out the people and the place of New Orleans was the beauty of God's grace.

New Orleans needs the gospel, needs mission trips like

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PRAISES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

PER, CONT. ours, because of the great need left by Hurricane Katrina, but just as importantly because of the beauty that is there.

We long to see God's kingdom more visible because it takes the broken and makes it whole. We go to places and people because he knows the beauty he has created in them. It is this beauty that often drives us to worshipping him.

Beth and I have come to love Lewiston, warts and all. But I recognize now that I often see the needs far more than I see the beauty. It took going to New Orleans and having my face rubbed in the beauty of New Orleans to pause and reflect on the beauty in Lewiston. And to be reminded that we are here, not just because of the ugly stains of sin in our area, but also because of the glory of the beauty that God has lavished here.

So to respond to Bob Dylan:
"I felt like I'd been misplaced in the cosmos and I belonged in Maine." Terry Goodkind

KEN, CONT. overgrown empty lots where homes once stood. Some neighborhoods seem comprised of only concrete foundations, as if whole communities have given way to a graveyard for giants.

Yet, despite this astounding suffering, still felt throughout New Orleans' neighborhoods, God's grace slices through the destruction, largely through the work of his people, the church. We visited two homes in which John and Per worked two years ago that were beautifully rehabbed. Both owners were eager to show us their homes, and both expressed gratitude for the many volunteers who worked, and still work, to help those devastated by Katrina.

Like the neighborhoods of New Orleans, God is with us and knows our pain. He has a plan to rehab our hearts into something beautiful and new. He may visibly proceed more slowly in us than in our neighbor; he may physically move us to a different environment altogether; he may allow us to suffer even greater pain. But much like a visit to New Orleans, if one sets one's sights on the devastation then devastation is all one sees. We were just four guys working on one house in New Orleans, just one piece of God's grace working in a broken life. Instead of focusing on the devastation, I will set my sights on God's overwhelming grace and look forward to seeing the progress next year, not only in Linda Joseph, but also in me.

- ✎ Praise that God knows our pain and is working to transform us according to the work of his Spirit in us. Pray that this transformation would bring glory to God and be used by him to draw others to himself.
- ✎ Praise for the beauty God has lavishly bestowed on and in our community. Pray that we would see it often and glorify God for it. Pray that we would seek for this beauty to become more visible through the redeeming work of Christ.
- ✎ Pray for Linda as she struggles with back pain.
- ✎ Pray for the Almquists as they continue to try to settle into the schedule of a new school year.
- ✎ Pray for Free Grace as we discuss what needs to happen before we can begin weekly worship. Pray for wisdom to see not human steps but what God is doing.
- ✎ Pray for Jordan's Bridge as Ken brings the power of the gospel into the lives of broken people. Pray for wisdom in his counseling and healing for those he sees.



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