

May 30, 2006

We are in day 4 of our Amazon journey. Travel went smoothly Friday and Saturday as we experienced no delays. We were even able to rest for a few hours at the guest house in Lima before departing for Iquitos. Everyone has been in good spirits and good health so far.

Saturday we boarded the boat and began our way upriver. After stopping briefly in Pebas Sunday morning, we continued on towards the Cochicinas River, picking up pastor Raul and his family on the way. Since this was the place where the group experienced a strong sense of darkness on the previous trip, we entered the river with prayer and praise. When we arrived we were able to enter the house of either the curaca or another village leader. Seeing how this place only has approximately 20-30 people in it, a turn-out of 8-10 adults was good. We entered the above-ground hut, gringos almost out-numbering natives, and we began to share with them why we had come so far. Jeff spoke first, then we sang, then Jake spoke in simple yet understandable Spanish. He continued in English with Jeff translating. Richar closed offering a powerful call to receive the gospel. I believe that almost every adult in that place accepted and believed without hesitation. It was getting dark and raining, yet we stayed to pray over the sick. It was a mud slip-and-slide on the way back to the boat, but we made it without injury. To God be the glory!

Today (Tuesday) we are waiting out the rain, so I realize even more how Sunday night was God's timing for those people. He made a perfect way. Even though many tend to be drunk on the weekend (and this was the experience before) this was not the case this time. Everyone was sober and able to listen. Not only that, but they were willing to have complete strangers from very far away enter their home. There was a slight tension at first – their fear of us mixed with our fear of the unknown. But God totally dissolved this with his love flowing through us. All the while we were traveling there was no sense of darkness, but only a great peace.

The group arrived back at San Francisco late Sunday night with plans to drop off me and Jake, Pedro and Danny. However, everyone was already asleep, so we docked and spent another night on the boat. Early Monday morning we took our things and left the group. Pedro had secured us a place to stay and meals for the next couple of days. Our "hotel" is new and fairly nice (for the jungle). We have beds with a mosquito net canopy and toilet. The shower was the only surprise – a large trash can full of water with a bucket! We ate breakfast and spent the morning visiting 3 villages. Two of these had been visited before by Wedgwood with some response. The third had not and while Pedro thought they were unbelievers, it turned out that this third village – Santa Rosa – had a previous Christian influence. But let me back up... We took a peki-peki ride to our first village (I believe named Ramanso). This place had quite a response on a previous trip, so we knew going in that we would be speaking to mostly Christians. The children and several adults gathered in the concrete school building to sing songs and hear the word of God. Jake spoke to the adults of the importance of teaching the children the things of God. Pedro preached and several prayed to receive Christ – mostly women and older children. The men there seemed to have already made decisions and were very curious and inquisitive. They were into the songs as much as the children. We gave out Bibles and discipleship materials to one of the apparent leaders. They seemed encouraged and glad we came.

The next village was Santa Isabel. There were only a few adults and mostly children who came to the school. While stepping out of the boat Jake had fallen into a lot of mud. The Spirit enabled him to turn this into an illustration. He asked the children if his shoes were clean. Of course they shouted no and so he went on to explain how we are dirty in our sins, but Jesus makes us clean, pure, new. A few responded to the gospel – older teenagers to those in their early 20s it seemed. They were not as eager as the previous place, but we still handed out Bibles, tracts, and materials. The third village, Santa Rosa had a well-known professor who was teaching the students when we arrived. He let them out to come to the open-air school room. They came in their uniforms with book bags and books. This place seemed cleaner and more educated than others. The children were very obedient. Jake shared about how Christ is our friend. Raul shared and Pedro preached. The few adults did not seem to listen at first, but come to find out they were already Christians. One lady asked for a Bible and we gave out tracts and some discipleship material.

By now it was past lunchtime and we were growing weak. We returned to San Francisco, had lunch, and rested most of the afternoon. After dinner we went to the church for a service they had just because we were in town. We sang and sang. Pedro talked about us and our mission. Then he preached about the rich man and Lazarus – mainly a plea to the church to evangelize their own area. Several youth were supposed to go with us today to three more villages, but it looks like the rain is going to stop us. We are sad but have prayed for God's prevailing purposes. Pedro had arranged for a fast-boat to take us to Pebas around 1p.m. We may get there early enough to go to extra villages tomorrow and Thursday.

Right now Danny is outside witnessing to a man staying here at this place with us. He is apparently Catholic but very inquisitive. They are singing from the song book right now. So, God is in control. He has specific plans for us here. I have been overwhelmed with peace and his grace to even allow me to be here in the first place!

May 31, 2006

Our "fast-boat" to Pebas turned out to be a 6 hour peki-peki ride. Given the boat was a larger peki-peki with a "cover" (a bright blue tarp) for our baggage, the Peruvians seemed to think this was a good deal. Hmm... It actually wasn't so bad at first because it provided a unique close-up view of the jungle and we were able to play cards for an hour or so. But when the sun set and the rain came, it was rather scary and uncomfortable. We prayed, sang, and prayed some more. Finally the lights of Pebas were like a bustling metropolitan city to us. We were so happy to be "home" in Pebas. Oh, if you could only understand the irony!

This morning, after resting well, we went to Santa Lucia. We had a short service there in which a few attended. (Many were out working and most children were at school.) But they seemed encouraged and agreed to go with us this afternoon to Mangual and Piri. After the service we played a little soccer. It was 4 Peruvian women + me verses Jake, Pedro, and Albertano. Jake was the goalie. It didn't play for long because it was obvious that I wasn't contributing much! Jake prevented many goals simply by his size and the "intimidation" factor. It was a lot of fun, though, to watch and to laugh with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We visited the school and passed out candy.

After lunch we met up with several from Santa Lucia to head towards Mangual. A few believers gathered together and 3 from Santa Lucia shared scripture and gave a testimony. Jake read Ephesians 2:8-9 emphasizing grace by faith and not by works. Pedro led us in some songs and we left for Piri.

We arrived back in Pebas drenched by the rain but filled with the joy of fellowship. Everyone was smiles and laughter. The bridge to Piri has been taken down, so we had to cross a muddy slope to get there. The village was about to have a town meeting and many were watching a soccer game, so we left with plans to return in the morning. Tomorrow should consist of a visit to Piri, and possibly another village. In the afternoon we will return to Santa Luci for a service, baptisms, and possibly a little soccer.

There has been a wedding here at Casa de Loma all day. The dancing and music has finally stopped (but only for a time). There are many best-dressed Peruvians socializing and consuming much alcohol below us right now. Just another exciting day in this jungle city! Praise God we were able to meet a Peruvian girl here for the wedding that speaks English. She has lived in the states before and currently lives in Lima. She was interested in what we were doing here and received the New Testament and tracks we gave her. She said she would read them and I gave her my email address. Pray that God will continue to open doors with Eva.

June 2, 2006

Well, we (me and Jake, Pedro and Danny) are here on a Peruvian lancha (boat) on our way back to Iquitos. I can't begin to describe this experience. We had no choice when it came down to it. There were no more cabins, so we agreed to stay in hammocks, but because of the Peruvian national election on Sunday, EVERYONE is traveling! There are probably 400 + people on this 150 capacity boat with no more room left for hammocks. The sun is finally going down so we're sitting on the open-air part of the top deck (somewhat away from all the people). We're right above the engine which billows thick clouds of black smoke every time we stop. There is a large fish (about 2 feet long) dangling from a metal hook over the edge of the boat about 6ft. away from me. There are many dark faces staring at me and many unpleasant smells accompanying my every turn. Why must I mention this dirty side of being a missionary? Well, it is a reality! And for all of you out there thinking about coming to Peru... This is hard!

We as comfortable, clean Americans can't understand living under these circumstances. I am constantly reminded how much more so the sacrifice of Christ to leave heaven and come to earth...to take on the dirtiness of our sins...and to therefore rescue us from destroying ourselves. Keeping this in mind humbles us and keeps us going. We still don't understand and we may not always FEEL like rejoicing, but how can we not praise our Lord when he redeems us from utter darkness? The ONLY reason we are here is to share that same hope with people, created by God, and needing only an obedient messenger. Please don't elevate us in your minds. Please don't view us as "super" Christians. We are all called to suffer. Yours might look completely different but be all the more real and hard. Just remember, "Blessed be the name of the Lord...on a road marked with suffering...when there's pain in the offering... Blessed be the name." Because HE is worthy!

Well, let me back up and share what God has done. We have spent most of our time here encouraging the established churches to reach out to one another and to the lost. Santa Lucia is still growing strong. After a short morning in Piri (there were only children) we returned to Santa Lucia with the pastor and others from the church in Pebas. We had a service in which the pastor shared of the importance of baptism. Then 3 gave their testimonies and were baptized in the river. We bought some artisan work from them and then hung around for a couple games of soccer. It was truly a great time of fellowship for everyone.

Around dinnertime Jake started feeling a little nauseous and didn't feel like eating. As the evening progressed he got worse. We prayed over him a couple of times. Pedro went to get him a pill for nausea from the hospital. He tried some vitamins, too, and eventually was able to "get rid off" what was in his system. Through the night he continued to have chills and we think a fever. Assuming this was an infection, we sent Pedro this morning to get an antibiotic. He came back with a doctor friend who gave Jake a shot and 4 follow-up pills. Thank the Lord his nausea left and he regained enough strength to make it to the port. However, the 10 minute wait for the lancha turned into 3 hours! We tried to find a rapido (fast boat), but being last minute, they were all booked because of the elections. Considering our current circumstances Jake is doing okay. He is able to stretch out and somewhat rest on this not-as-crowded deck. We are so thankful that his health was restored enough to travel. We should make it to Iquitos by early morning (Saturday).

Back Home

Well, the trip ended well. We arrived back in Iquitos and Jake was feeling much better. Unfortunately Danny had his wallet stolen as soon as we exited the lancha. We spend some time helping him report this and call his credit cards. After a much-desired shower and meal we rested some and waited on the other group. They arrived safely and we shared sweet fellowship as we told stories of all that God had done. Through the good and the bad God taught me many things that I continue to work through today. He is Lord of all and his ways are much higher than ours. Who are we to think that we can repay his goodness to us? Who are we to think that we can question his testing of us? Truly, "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have called according to his purpose." Praise him!