

May 24, 2010

Greetings friends in Christ,

What a busy time of the year this is! I've been on the road a lot lately, which is why this is late in getting to you. The month of May is peppered with special days of celebration. The first week of the month the Nation recognized the National Day of Prayer on May 6<sup>th</sup>. Many are preparing for graduations, whether from high school or college. May is also a month marked by many weddings and family celebrations. At the end of the month we celebrate Memorial Day, when we remember the men and women who have given their lives in service of our nation. There are many reasons to celebrate this month. The Church continues to celebrate the season of Easter and our Lord's resurrection.

We also celebrate the Ascension of Jesus in May. Luke tells us, ***"Then He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God."*** What an encouraging picture for the Church. But that's not where it ended. Imagine the confusion the disciples experienced.

Within a few short weeks they had experienced the gamut of emotions as they watched Jesus taken by soldiers in the garden, followed at a distance as they paraded Him through the city of Jerusalem, and finally felt the horror as they saw Him being crucified at Golgotha. Dejected, they hid away fearing repercussions until Jesus

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appeared to them in the Upper Room. How overjoyed they were that Jesus was alive. Don't you think they expected life to return to what had become normal for them? Sure, some still wouldn't like Jesus, but they were used to that. Things had certainly changed, but it was just good to have Jesus back with them. Then, when He led them out to Bethany, I can't fathom that they understood what was about to happen. Jesus, who had come back to them, was about to leave again.

Luke's report makes it seem as if it was like an organized church service. They went out and when He ascended they worshipped Him. Granted, Luke is looking back at events, and hindsight often gives perspective. As the Holy Spirit helped them gain insight and peace, certainly they felt a great joy. But I know that had I been there at Bethany with Jesus, and watched as He ascended and disappeared into the clouds, in confusion and fear I would have cried, and through my tears said, "Jesus, when You rose from the dead I thought You were coming back to stay with us forever!"

Our joy is found in God's Word. In Matthew 28 we have that beautiful, familiar and powerful promise of Jesus, ***"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*** Whether or not we visibly see Jesus, His promise is that He is with us, always! In the midst of uncertainty I find joy in remembering these words of Jesus. As they are for me, they're also for you!

In John 12:31-32 Jesus says, ***"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself."*** Some say that in this Jesus was pointing the disciples forward to the Ascension, and it

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certainly does apply. In another sense, it seems to me that if we apply this to today, when you and I lift Jesus up in our lives, in how we live and act and speak, especially as we reach out to those who don't know Jesus where we live, it serves as a way to draw people to Jesus. Our calling, as those redeemed by the blood of Jesus, is to lift Jesus higher for the whole world to see. When we do that we become "little Christs" to the communities in which God has placed us.

I mentioned a quote to the Region 1 Pastors when I preached at their gathering, from Author Rebecca Manley Pippert, who wrote, "Jesus . . . wants us to see that the neighbor next door or the people sitting next to us on a plane or in a classroom are not interruptions to our schedule. They are there by *divine appointment*. Jesus wants us to see their needs, their loneliness, their longings, and He wants to give us the courage to reach out to them."

What struck me most was this thought: God places people in your path and mine path by "divine appointment." Who is it in your life whom God has placed there by divine appointment? How can your life lift Jesus up for the world to see?

God is counting on us. God is counting on me.  
God is counting on you.

## **Greg**

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