April 18, 2010 John 20:19-29

RESURRECTION NEWS:

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN MISSING?

Once again I turn to one of my favorite author for a thought. Max's book, NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE SAVIOR back cover tells us this about the book, but I believe during this resurrection news season it is for our lives as well. It says, "It all comes down to one thing: When your life feels hollow, what can fill it with meaning? If someone asked you, "What makes Christianity different from any other religion? How would you answer? When you need reassurance that someone deeply loves you, where can you turn? THE CROSS! You have seen it. You have worn it. Maybe you have been prayed to it. But do you know it? Any serious study of the Christian claim is, at its essence, a study of the cross. To accept or reject Christ without careful examination of Calvary is like deciding on a car without looking at the engine. So take a good look at the cross. Examine this hour in history. Look at the witnesses, Listen to the voices. Watch the faces. MOST OF ALL, OBESERVE THE ONE THEY CALL THE SAVIOR. Because what he did is the one thing that matters most of all." Let me add to this the chorus to one of our hymns, "At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light and the burden of my heart rolled away. It was there by faith that I received my sight and now I am happy all the day." This hymn was written by Isaac Watts

and the Scripture that goes with it is this…. “The message of the cross is the power of God” from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians.

Interesting thought, don’t you think? I mean, here we are two weeks removed from Easter and we are still focusing on the cross, but now it’s the empty cross. During lent we focused on the cross and it’s cruel suffering. At Easter and thereafter, we focus on the empty cross because he lives. Suffering and joy, that’s what it’s all about, you can’t separate the two. They are like Reese’s candy; you know mixing chocolate and peanut butter. It’s like peanut butter and fluff or peanut butter and jelly. It’s like an Oreo cookie, the chocolate outer cookie and the white inside. Or chocolate chip cookies. They just go together. It’s as natural as well, life itself. It’s like Abbot and Costello, the old Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

“Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph over his foes” we sing in victory and praise. It reminds us that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ live today and because he does, he makes a difference in the life that surrenders all to him.

You know, that’s one of the hardest things to do. It is so simple, yet so hard. Pride gets in the way of surrender. We just can’t seem to let go and let God. I know because it happened in my life. The night I heard the Gospel message about Jesus Christ and that he died for my sins the preacher’s words got to me but my pride held me back from accepting the invitation to receive Christ. Being Catholic I never heard preaching like that, you know that “fire and brimstone” stuff. But

that night I had unrest in my heart. My spirit was in turmoil. I fought the feeling as best I could. I didn't need this. I didn't need to go to an altar, after all I was Catholic and well, they told me I was okay as long as I didn't die with mortal sin in my life and God does forgive. I wasn't a bad person. No! I didn't need to do that. It was for others….it was for Protestants. So the next night I went back to the Methodist church and Carole remained home because her back was hurting. A youth group shared a drama about a better way of living. Through their drama I lifted my hand when the invitation was given to receive Christ. My pride was stripped away like a banana being stripped to be eaten as I took that first step to an altar of grace to receive Jesus as my Savior and my life has been wonderfully changed as I learned how to grow in the grace and love of Jesus Christ. Through the early days I learned what a hymn says, I learned to surrender all….over and over and over again. I'm a work in process. I'm a Christian under construction.

If you look at the middle letter in the word 'pride' you would see it is the letter 'I." I get in the way. I want to do it its way. One of Frank Sinatra's famous songs was "My Way." He not only sang it, he lived it. He did it his way. He lived, loved, and died his way. And those who follow that same philosophy are missing out on something. Are you missing out too? Maybe someday we can change the words to say, "I lived, I loved, and I did it, God's way."

This morning we focus once again on the days just following the resurrection. Jesus has risen. The women have spread the news to the disciples they had seen him. The disciples are confused and as one gospel said last week they not only did not believe they thought the story of his resurrection was nonsense. While they were in the Upper Room, something happens that changes their hearts. Hear John's account of that upper room experience found in John 20:19-21 **READ**

"*Peace be with you"* came the words out of nowhere. Windows closed. Doors closed. Disciples sitting around mopping, their hearts saddened, and dreams busted, hopes dashed, future uncertain, afraid to go out into the world and back to their fishing holes, afraid to stay in the Upper Room because maybe they would be found by religious leaders and face what their Master had faced. Words from the women didn't help. But all reports were the same….there was no denying that….when the women went to the tomb they found the stone rolled away and the tomb was empty. And besides that, some reported words from an angel or two that the Jesus they were looking for was not there but had risen. For them great news. For the disciples uncertainty.

But then those words…those words that changes their lives. *"Peace be with you"* and there stood Jesus with nail prints in his hands. HE REALLY HAD RISEN! HE IS ALIVE!

That's what has changed heart after heart. God's promise is real…that those who believe in His Son and follow in His way, repent of their sinful nature, and accept Him into their hearts will have a new life. They will be BORN AGAIN!

Now I know some people will wonder why I keep going back to thoughts like that and I will tell you this….that's the gospel news. That's the resurrection news. The good news is this…because Jesus lives, we live too. It's not a one day thing, or once a year thing, it's an everyday thing. He Lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and he talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives. He lives salvation to impart."

Look at these 10 guys that day. Fearful, ashamed, hopeless, can I throw in, lost? Sounds like a lot of people living in this century, right here in the United States, right here in good old Williamsville. But in a split second the lives of those 10 disciples were transformed. Just a few words changed them, for they had new life. "Peace be with you." That's all it took. And who knows how long Jesus stayed that day and what he said to them. I don't think he chastised them for running away when he needed them. I don't think…rather I know he didn't turn to Peter and say, "Peter, I told you, you would deny me 3 times." He didn't chastise them for not believing the women's message. Nope! None of that happened. Yet, these frustrated disciples found peace and hope and forgiveness and a new life in Christ.

And then one more thing….JESUS BREATHED ON THEM TO RECEICE THE HOLY SPIRIT!!! He now commissions them…. He said to those who thought the resurrection was nonsense until they saw with their own eyes "*As the Father sent me, I now send you."And he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* And with that, they were mystically changed, transformed, in the process of becoming true believers. They must have hugged each other and danced and danced, holding each other's hand maybe they did a Jewish celebration dance as they strutted around the room and they began praising God because it wasn't through the testimony of the women any more. They had seen him themselves. They saw his nail prints, and his side where he was pierced with a sword. The evidence was awesome! They heard him with their own ears. They saw him with their own eyes. They touched him with their own hands. Transformation was in process. The disciples were becoming new creatures through the Christ that they had followed for 3 years and who had breathed new life into them.

You want to know for sure that they were excited? Look at the next section in John's gospel. Hear again God's words found in verses' 24-29 **READ.**

"Thomas, Thomas, where in heaven's name have you been this past week? We've been looking for you. We've got good news to tell you. HE'S ALVIE! JESUS IS ALIVE! The women were right. They have seen the Lord. Last week when you were gone we all saw him. We touched him. We heard his voice. He is

alive!" said the disciples one after the other to Thomas. You see, as we read, Thomas was among the missing that first time Jesus visited them. He missed so much that day. He still doubted. He wanted more proof. Unless he saw with his own eyes, touched with his own hands, heard with his own ears there were still questions in his mind. Perhaps before he got those last words out of his mouth, there came a light into a room where once again all the windows were closed, the door closed and it was just the 11 disciples. With the light came a voice, "Peace be with you." The other disciples recognized that voice from the previous week and smiled with glee. There appeared the Lord Jesus Christ as he walked and stood in front of a stunned doubting Thomas whose eyes were as wide open as they could be, and his mouth just as wide, as he looked upon Jesus. "Thomas I understand you have a problem believing I'm alive. You didn't believe the women's story. You didn't believe that I had risen even though your friends Peter and John ran and found the tomb empty just as the women had said. You all didn't believe Mary when she told you what I said to her. Now Thomas, to remove any more of your doubts, come, touch the holes in my hands where they drove the nails to hold me on the cross. And touch here, my side where the soldier pierced me with his sword. See the holes in my forehead from the crown of thorns they crowned me with. And Thomas, stop being a doubter, but be a believer, for I have a mission for you as well as your brothers in the faith When Jesus stopped talking Thomas fell on

his knees before him weeping saying, “Lord, forgive me. I don’t have to touch to know you are alive. Forgive my unbelief.” And Jesus said, “You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who believe even though they do not see.” And with that, the Upper Room experience ends.

But that isn’t the end of the story. You see, we are those people who Jesus was talking about…those who need to believe even though we haven’t seen his wounds, his risen body. We are the ones that this message is for. We are the ones who might still have doubts. But there are stories of those who have experienced the resurrection and we need to believe their stories. It’s amazing. One after the other, lives changed, hearts melted, lives given to Jesus. Amazing. Truly amazing grace in action.

You know I wonder what ever happened to Barabbas. I wonder if he hightailed it out of town following his release from prison by Pilate. But then I wonder if somehow his curiosity got the best of him and he stayed around for awhile to see what they were going to do with the man that took his place on the cross. Maybe he was in the crowd at the cross. Maybe he was having breakfast at the local coffee shop early that morning before heading out of town when he heard the news that the tomb was empty and some had seen Jesus, for he had risen. Maybe he ran and saw for himself the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Maybe, just maybe his doubts of who this man was that took his place, were

exchanged to believing that this man who did no wrong died in his place. Maybe he found his way to the Upper Room and talked with the disciples telling them how his heart had been strangely warmed when Jesus took his place on the cross. He literally died for him. Perhaps, yes perhaps, he became a believer and had a powerful story to tell others. I'm sure if that did happen, life after life became transformed through the power of his testimony.

Friends, the story still goes on doesn't it. Jesus says to many of us stop being doubters but believers. Many people still make trips to the Holy Land and they walk the paths where Jesus walked. They go to the garden where he prayed so hard his sweat turned to blood. It was the same place his disciples fell asleep while he prayed and where Judas betrayed him with a kiss. Many walk the streets where Jesus was said to have carried his cross through the streets on the way to that hill we call Calvary. They go and see his tomb. They see the stone rolled away after all these years and yes, the tomb was empty, not because someone stole his body, but because he has risen! You are allowed to walk in to see for yourself…he isn't there. He has risen indeed! Just because some of you have not made that trip doesn't mean it is not true. It is by faith that we believe that Christ has risen.

I hope you haven't missed what this story is all about. I hope all your doubts have been dealt with. I hope your faith has come alive with the resurrection news that "Up from the grave he arose, he arose a victor from the dark domain and he

lives today." You see that's a powerful story. No one over these years has ever been able to prove differently. The claims of Christianity have lasted the test of time. The facts are still there. The tomb was empty. The women saw him. The disciples saw him. Thomas saw him. Have you seen him? Have you seen him today? Have you seen him in your struggles? Have you seen him in your joys? Have you seen him? He's here and he invites those who still doubt to come touch his robe and stop doubting, but believe. You see he wants to live in those who will open the doors of their hearts. Don't be afraid to surrender to him because with him living in you, life can only get better, for he is the way and the truth and life itself….what you might be missing in your life can be found today….through believing….believing in Jesus as your Savior! Don't let foolish pride get in the way of your coming to know Jesus as Savior. Don't let foolish pride get in the way of believing he lives today and wants to live in your heart…..

Let me go back to the words on the back of Lucado's book….

"It all comes down to one thing: When your life feels hollow, what can fill it with meaning? …When you need reassurance that someone deeply loves you, where can you turn?

THE CROSS! You have seen it. You have worn it… But do you know it? So take a good look at the cross... Look at the witnesses, Listen to the voices. Watch the faces. MOST OF ALL, OBESERVE THE ONE THEY CALL THE SAVIOR.

Because what he did is the one thing that matters most of all (*he died to set you free and has risen to give you life.)*”

No wonder they call him Savior!