NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE SAVIOR

I have been rereading one of my old books by Max Lucado called “No Wonder They Call Him The Savior” so that I can get a fresh look at those last days in the life of Jesus in order to prepare myself and you for the victory on Easter Sunday. As you all know I love to preach and love to see new things in God’s word hoping they will be helpful for you as well. After all it is “The Living Word of God” that helps us daily that can transform your life. On the back page 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?” You should all know the answer, for the answer is THE CROSS.” It shows just one nail as it continues, “You have seen it, you have worn it. Maybe you have even prayed to it. BUT DO YOU KNOW IT?.... 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, OBSERVE THE ONE THEY CALL THE SAVIOR because what he did is the one thing that matters most of all.”

All the music through Lent has one focus, the cross as it leads us home helping us examine the claims of the cross. Each closing hymn reminds us of the cross. This morning’s song is no different for it is short and to the point and it’s message is the message of Lent, the message God wants to give to his people who struggle day after day, year after year, even moment after moment. People who have lost hope, people who struggle with addiction to drugs and sin. People who struggle with lives little or big problems. People wonder when things go wrong where is God? Others who don’t have much faith say it doesn’t matter what you believe or in whom you believe. People walk around with their heads down in despair. It’s time to look up, look up to the cross and remember the story of God’s Son who died to
set us free from our doubts and from all the baggage we have collected all the years of our lives. In John’s gospel Jesus said he needed to lifted up like the bronze snake on the pole in the wilderness that brought healing to those who were bitten by poisonous snakes. For them it was real snakes. For the world it’s that old snake-in-the-grass we call Satan, for he has taken a bite out of many and poisoned many a heart and soul with doubts and sin. The cross is the answer for on that old rugged cross our Savior was lifted up so that those who looked up could be healed. At the cross where I first saw the light guess the burdens of our hearts are rolled away.

The healing of the cross is for everyone. It’s for those who have made a commitment to hang in there every day. It’s for the person who thinks God doesn’t exist because things are not going well these days. It’s for someone with a terminal illness who is getting close to heaven’s gate. It’s for the one with mental problems who needs help so they can find peace and know they have some worth. It’s for the many people in hospital rooms, or nursing homes or are homebound, or those who are lonely and struggle or those going through a rough family time. It’s for those who have lost their way. It’s for those whose faith has taken a detour. It’s for those who pray, read their Bible and rejoice because it is a reminder that one day we will see Jesus face to face and all our worries will be over. It’s a message that offers hope and if we look close enough the cross answers our questions. The story of the cross is not hollow but full of truth. It’s the story of suffering and pain, yet victory can be seen when it’s all over. It’s a story of a love affair between God, Jesus and the world. It’s a story of reconciliation, forgiveness, hope and life. It’s the story that leads you on a path that has been traveled by God himself. He has paved the way so that his children, that would be us, can leave our baggage of junk behind and walk in newness of life leaving those frustrations, anger, loneliness and a host of other things behind. That’s why I love to tell the story of Jesus and his love. It will be my theme all the way to glory. You’ve already heard the choir sing, but let me read those words and let them sink in. Remember, Lent, Holy Week, Easter is a reminder
of a new beginning offered to all who want a better life now, and eternal life when
this life comes to an end. The choir sang “The way of the cross leads home; the way
of the cross leads home. It is sweet to know as I onward go, the way of the cross
leads home... In the cross be my glory ever, till my raptured soul shall find, rest
beyond the river. The way of the cross leads home...the cross leads home.” In
Matthew’s gospel Jesus said, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me....for my yoke is
easy and my burden is light.”

God cares. The continued invitation is “Come to me all who are weary and
burdened.” Isn’t that you sometimes? Isn’t that me? Life isn’t always great. Stuff
happens. The one thing that remains steady and strong is our faith in the empty
cross. Weary? Burdened? The answer, the real answer is found at the cross. He
cared enough to allow his son to die in our place. Jesus could have told his Father
let them work it out on their own. He could have gave into Satan when he was
tested in the wilderness. But he didn’t. He took the world upon himself on that
cross. He did it when the world was in chaos and God seemed so distant for many.
Jesus came and saw the needs of the people. He saw how they were hurting and
were like sheep without a shepherd. He had compassion for what he saw. He saw
the sick and the lame, the blind and the demon possessed that wandered around. He
saw lepers living apart from their families. He saw the religious leaders taking
advantage of the people who came seeking God. He saw lots of injustice. God saw
through the eyes of his Son what the world looked like and he knew he had made
the right decision to send his Son into the world to lead the world back home to
himself. But the road to God, to reconciliation would have to come through the
cross of humility and shame. He loved the world so much that his Son stretched out
his arms from this side of a sinful world so that all sinners saved by his grace, could
walk across the valley of hell into the glory of heaven. You see, you can’t get to
heaven without going through the cross. And I think that should bring a rousing
‘AMEN!’

Paul, who believed he was the worst of sinners lets us know that if God could forgive him, then he can forgive anyone. Paul tells the world how he feels by his words found in his letter to the Corinthian church. He says to us, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I have received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the 12. After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles and last of all, he appeared to me.”

Folks, think about what Paul reminds. Fact number one, Jesus lived. Fact two, he died. Fact three, he has risen from the dead. Fact four, he lives today. Then he gives us evidence of his rising. Fact one, he was seen by Peter. Fact two, he appeared in the Upper Room twice, the second, Doubting Thomas didn’t have to touch his wounds to believe. Fact three, he was seen by over 500 people, then James and the other apostles. Fact four, the risen Christ appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road. Finally, he still touches lives today and because he lives, many more have a chance to feel his love and grace. Because he lives, we can always face the future. Because he lives we need not fear. Because no matter how others might feel, for the Christian, because he lives we know who holds the future and if we stay on the way of the cross that leads home, we will find our total victory at the gates of heaven.

Last Sunday most of you, if not all who were here were given a chance to write the baggage you carry in your life and bring that bag and place it at the foot of the cross and walk away leaving it all there so you could be free to walk in newness
of life and start fresh leaving behind those burdens, those sins, that have weighted you down. Without asking anyone to share, I want you to think about this past week and ask you how your week was. Did you feel free? Did you feel lighter? Did you smile more? Was there more joy? Did you feel relieved? Did you get some stuff off your chest as you gave it to God? But did some of those things you wrote come back again? Did the old hurts resurface? Yes, that old serpent knows how to get to us, doesn’t he.

Those things you wrote and stuffed in your bag are hanging there on the cross for now. They are all bagged together given to Jesus and we see them to remind us that we have given all to Jesus, no matter how painful some of them might be. Soon, and very soon, that bag will be gone reminding us he took them to the cross and to the grave and he took them to heaven not for the Father to look at and write in our log book, but so that he could put his hands over them and with his grace forgive where forgiveness is needed, give strength where it is needed, supply courage as you face the difficulties of life, give wisdom where decisions need to be made. Here is the good thing. The moment you wrote that stuff down…the moment you put them in your sack…the moment you came forward and left them here, the healing has begun and God was already saying, “yes my child, I see them all and you are set free.”

Do you know the power that was found at the cross? Do you know the lives that were touched? A Centurion cried out that this man must be the Son of God. Religious leaders were left wondering what they had just done. The troops who nailed Jesus to the cross and gambled for his clothing perhaps couldn’t shake what happened when it seems all hell broke loose with the thunder and such as Jesus took his last breath. Nicodemus felt his heart strangely warmed, as did Joseph who offered up his own grave for Jesus to “borrow.” And then there were the tears of his mother Mary and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who were there to the very end. Sadness was there. Hope seemed loss. Anger present because he didn’t
deserve to die. Frustration because now what was going to happen to them and the world. They were all locked in the grave on the side of the hill as the stone was rolled to seal and lock Jesus in for eternity….but that was Friday and Sunday was going to come.

Let me give you a few examples of what you can find at the cross, and this list is not full, for there’s more miracles to be found there.

First, forgiveness. Jesus said, “Father forgive them.” Second hope, a thief hears today he would join Jesus in paradise even though he was a career criminal. Third love was there watching over his mother and a friend who was to watch over her. But don’t forget the love he had for the world. And finally you find salvation because Jesus’ last words were “It is finished.” A call of deliverance. A cry of completion.

It’s all there for us to see as Jesus went to the cross. He did it so that our joy could be full. He did it so that we could be free of our baggage. He did it so that we could find hope. He did is so we could find salvation. He did it so we could find love. He did it so that we could find forgiveness. He did so we could find eternal life. He did it so we could find faith. He did it so we could be made whole. He did it so that we could be healed. He did it to restore a relationship. And most importantly he did it so we could find God.

The nails couldn’t hold him. The soldiers couldn’t keep him there. Not even his Father in heaven could have kept him there if he wanted to be free. What kept him there was love. His love for the whole world. His love that wants to set the world free from the grips of Satan. That’s what kept him there! That road….the road to Calvary leads us home.

Max is right on! It all comes down to one thing: when your life feels hollow, what can fill it with meaning? The answer…the cross. If someone asks you what
makes Christianity different? The answer….the cross. When you need assurance that someone deeply loves you where do you turn?....the Answer….the cross.

Our closing hymn is this….When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour content on all my pride. …” Now pay close attention to this last verse. “We’re the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

The cross changes everything. It changed history. It changed those who were at the foot of the cross. It changed the scared disciples. It changed a religious community. It changed a whole world. Friends if you allow it, the cross will change you and will lead you home. That’s why we do not take our faith for granted for it cost so much. No wonder Jesus is called the Savior, for he gave his all that we might have a more abundant life through him.

Let the people of God shout ‘Amen!’