**SUNDAY, 4/24/22**

**SERMON ON JOHN 20:19-31**

Everyone here has a story.

I have a story.

Each of you have a story.

Some of our stories read like tragedies.

Others are more like comedies.

Some are mysteries, and others are romances.

Some are much longer than others.

And some are just getting started.

But everyone has a story.

All of our stories, different as they are, are part of a bigger story:

 a story which is older than any of us.

 a story which defines all of us,

 and can, if we let it, guide each of us.

It is, the greatest story ever told - the story of Jesus.

Thomas was struggling with his story.

All of the other apostles told Thomas they had seen Jesus alive.

But how could he know?

How could he be sure what they were telling him was true?

He had to see for himself, so he joined the others, and he waited, and he hoped.

Again, the doors were locked, but suddenly, as before,

 Jesus was standing among them.

"Peace be with you," he declared.

Then he turned to Thomas and said,

 "Put your finger here, and look at my hands.

 Put your hand into the wound in my side.

 Don't be faithless any longer, but believe!"

Thomas listened to Him, and did as Jesus told him.

And he knew this was truly Jesus, alive.

Thomas exclaimed with great joy: "My Lord and my God!"

And his life was changed forever.

A young farmer was cleaning up the farmyard around the barn.

In the tall grass he discovered an old wooden bucket.

It had been sitting next to the barn in the sun,

 unnoticed and unused for a long time.

He could see daylight between the wooden slats of the bucket.

Obviously this bucket would never hold water again.

It was useless and he was about to throw it into the fire.

But a more experienced farmer happened to stop by.

"This old bucket is not as useless as you think it is," he told the young farmer.

He picked up the old bucket, tied it to the well rope,

 and let it drop into the water below.

A few days later he returned to the younger farmer's home.

He turned the crank and drew the bucket back up.

It was full of clear, cool well water,

 and not a drop of water was leaking from the bucket.

The water had re-hydrated the wooden slats until they fit together tightly

 as originally designed, and the bucket was useful again.

As all the apostles encountered the living Jesus, they stopped their grieving,

 and turned to Him with great joy.

The Savior's presence restored their confidence and hope.

Their grieving and pain was changed because their leader was with them again.

They were filled with confidence and hope and happiness.

Their lives were changed because Jesus was with them.

Our lives are changed because we are no longer alone.

When we are close to our Savior, our lives are different.

We are filled with confidence and joy.

Our lives have meaning and purpose.

Jeremy was young man who was very skilled at picking pockets.

One day, he took something which felt like a wallet full of money.

But he discovered when he returned to his hiding place,

 that it was a copy of the New Testament.

Angry, he threw the Bible to the floor.

Yet later that night, unable to sleep, he remembered the little book.

He began to read the New Testament.

Reading the Bible changed his life.

Before long he abandoned his bad habits.

He surrendered his heart to Jesus.

He began to look for opportunities to tell the disciple stories about the risen Jesus.

He no longer picked the pockets of those around him.

He helped every one he could.

His life was full of happiness and satisfaction.

His life was changed forever, and it made a difference in his life,

 and in the lives of everyone he encountered,

 simply because he discovered the story of Jesus,

 and shared the story with others.

The great men and women of the Bible all won their victories by faith.

They simply took God at His word and acted on it.

And God honored their faith and gave them victory.

Faith is not simply saying that what God says is true.

Real faith is acting on what God says, because it is true.

Our lives are changed as we come close to our living Savior.

The lives of the disciples was not always easy.

Jesus said: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

The disciples, and all of us, encounter difficulties, pain, and suffering,

 as Jesus sends us to help and love those around us.

All of the apostles experienced pain and suffering as they shared

 the good news of our Savior.

We have all encountered heartaches and difficulties as we try to live God's way.

We wonder why there is so much pain, suffering, and evil in the world.

We are unable to understand it all.

Yet we continue to help and share the good news with others,

 even when we cannot understand.

We cannot understand why there is so much sickness, so many wars,

 so much death, when God loves us so much.

Yet God is the one who changed our lives, forever.

He gives us a second chance, and a third, and fourth.

He is always with us, even when we cannot understand.

He has plans for us.

He sends us to others, so they can know God.

He sends us to others, so they can experience His love.

He sends us to others, so they can know about God's forgiveness.

If God can hang the stars on high,

Can paint the clouds that drift on by,

Can send the sun across the sky.

What could He do through you?

If He can send a storm through space,

And dot with trees the mountain's face,

If He, the sparrow's way can trace,

What could He do through you?

If God can do such little things

As count our hairs, or birds that sing,

Control the universe that swings,

What could He do through you?

God sends us out into the world.

What is God doing through us?

Where is God sending you?

What is He doing through you?

AMEN