April 7, 2013 – Second Sunday in Easter /Holy Humor Sunday
“That’s a Laugh”
Pastor Christie John – Geneseo UMC
1 Corinthians 1:18-31, John 20:19-31

The apostle Thomas captures our imaginations – so much so that we have given him a nickname: “doubting Thomas.” I think we enjoy this story so much in part because it is not hard to imagine the scene from his perspective. As we mentioned last week, no one – not even the disciples - expected the resurrection. After all, Jesus was tortured and executed by one of the strongest and most efficient military powers in the world at that time. Jesus was unarguably dead and then as now, dead people tend to stay dead.

So when first Mary Magdalene, then the other disciples made outrageous claims that they had “seen the Lord,” who can blame Thomas for wondering if the disciples had made an awful mistake? For wondering if they were delirious, maybe, with grief and fear? Or who could fault Thomas for imagining in his own grief and fear that he was the victim of a misguided practical joke? Who could condemn Thomas for thinking – “Jesus alive? That’s a laugh!”

We can’t blame Thomas – maybe because we have been in his shoes, when we hear people confidently claim to have seen the risen Lord while we ache and struggle in our own worry and fear. When we see the powers of violence, greed, corruption and disease get the upper hand in our own lives, or in the lives of those we love or in the lives of the innocent. “Jesus is alive? That’s a laugh!”

A week after the disciples try without success to convince their friend that they have seen the Lord, Jesus appeared to the disciples while Thomas was with them. And I am so encouraged that Jesus didn’t say to Thomas – “shame on you!” But Jesus invited Thomas to do what Thomas needed as proof – to touch and see his scars.

Isn’t it something? Those scars were supposed to be evidence that the Roman Empire had won. That might makes right. That kindness, love and mercy may be nice spiritual ideals, but they were no match for the cold, hard reality of swords, nails and spears. Those scars were meant as proof that promises about joy and life can’t defeat pain and loss. They were supposed to serve as a warning: if you try to mess with the religiously powerful, the politically strong, and the socially well-connected, you’ll get what’s coming to you, because you can’t beat them and you can’t cheat death.

Jesus invited Thomas to look at his scars - and in my mind’s eye, that invitation always comes with a gentle smile. And when Thomas did ...he uttered the strongest confession of faith in all the gospels: “My Lord, and my God!”

What a stunning reversal!
Isn’t it lovely, that through Thomas, the one who insisted on seeing to believe – Jesus pronounces a special blessing on you and me and all those who do not see and still believe?

Our gospel reading this morning continues exploring the strange, wondrous, joyful mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - the “foolishness through which God brings light and life.” We rejoice that the disciples didn’t pull a fast one on Thomas - God pulled a fast one on the devil and all the evil forces who thought that they had won a victory through the death of Jesus, the Son of God. The joke of Easter is on them!

Because those scars that Thomas beheld were not, it turns out, evidence of a world hopelessly lost to hostility and corruption, but of a world turned upside down by the grace of God. Those scars witnessed to a God who through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus sent death packing, pushed the “reset button” on the entire way we understand who God is, how God works and how the universe operates. Real victory is dependent, after all, not on vengeance or aggression or sheer brutality, but on compassionate, holy justice and the force of divine, self-giving love.

The Easter joy that we celebrate this morning reflects and anticipates the new creation that God invites all of us to experience through a relationship with our living Lord. Jesus enters into our midst and calls us to himself in all kinds of ways - As we hear his word proclaimed and as we pray and as we sing his praise and through the sacrament of baptism, when we name the truth of who and whose we are. Jesus is among us as we listen to the testimony of those who have seen his goodness and he is here as we share Communion. We may recognize him in his servants who bear scars from the continuing fight against evil, injustice and oppression. And especially in those moments when our hearts are hurting, he comes to us in the loving words and actions of our Christian brothers and sisters.

With Thomas, may we come to know that Jesus is alive – and in that knowledge, may we dance, and sing and even laugh!