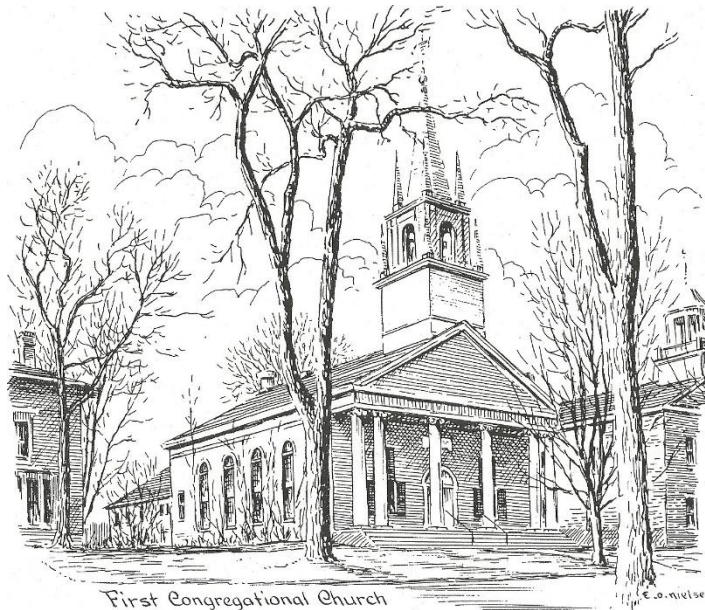


First Congregational Church
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
An Open and Affirming Church



We welcome you to the First Congregational Church of Wiscasset.

VISION: We are on a journey to reflect God's love, embracing diversity and affirming the dignity and worth of all.

MISSION: Together we strive to praise God, grow in faith, cultivate love, spread joy, care for all people and God's creation, promote peace, and do justice.

April 12, 2026

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER HOLY HUMOR SUNDAY

We welcome all to our worship service, whether present in the sanctuary, joining us on streaming video, or watching our service in the future.

Spiritual Contemplation Quote for the week: ‘If we couldn't laugh we would all go insane.’ — Robert Frost

PRELUDE *"Alleluia, Sing to Jesus"* Robert Lau

RINGING OF THE BELL

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHORAL INTROIT *"Be In Our Midst"* Douglas Wagner

* CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Ecclesiastes 3 says there is a right time to laugh, so... Why is a bad joke like a pencil?

All: Because it has no point!

L: What has ears but cannot hear?

All: A cornfield!

L: What did one plate say to the other plate?

All: Dinner is on me!

L: What makes God happy?

All: When we worship God with gladness; coming into God's presence with laughter and singing!

* OPENING HYMN *"Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"* No.7

OPENING INVOCATION TO PRAYER A CLOWN'S PRAYER

Jesus, you made the way for us to come and worship God. As we see your sacrifice lead us in the way of the wilderness, the way of the cross, the way that leads to eternal life. Amen.

JOYS AND CONCERNS: After each Joy or Concern, Please respond:

Pastor: "God," Congregation: **"Hear our prayer."**

LIGHTING OF THE PEACE CANDLE

Global Mission Partner Prayer this week: Lesotho

MORNING PRAYER

O God, giver of joy and laughter, we thank you for giving us these gifts. For the moments of laughter and unbridled joy you give to us: for opportunities to laugh at ourselves, for the belly laughs of children, for friends and family who love us because of our quirks, and not just in spite of them, for artists who give us the opportunity to see the world through the surreal, for the courage to smile even when difficulties arise, for those who have hope even when others think there is no hope, for saints in the Lord who overflow with laughter and spread your joy to all of us. For the words of Jesus that defy our logical minds; for teaching us that we can be born again, for the woman who finds a lost coin and calls her friends and neighbors to celebrate, for the absurdity of a camel trying to fit through the eye of a needle, for the father of the Prodigal Son who is willing to look like a fool as he runs to greet his son, for the generosity of the landowner who will pay workers a whole day's wage when they only worked one hour, for tiny bits of faith that can move entire mountains, for the reality that nothing can live unless it first dies. For the great reversal of the Gospel: that the last shall be made first, that the rejected stone became the cornerstone, that those who wish to become great must serve, that the lost will be found, that the small will become great, that though you are Wisdom, you choose to forget our sins, that when we are weak, your strength shines through us. O God, giver of joy and laughter, we thank you for giving us these gifts. Thank you for the gift you give us that allows us to enjoy these things to the fullest. We can laugh because of the most amazing thing of all – that you conquered death, that the tomb is empty, that light shone so bright that it overcame the darkness. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

SILENT MOMENTS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Choral Response

“Amen”

SCRIPTURE LESSON

John 20:19-31

SERMON

‘Persistence’

* HYMN

“Lord of the Dance”

No. 206

OFFERTORY PRAYER

OFFERTORY & CHORALE OFFERTORY *Because He Lives* arr. Jack Schrader

* DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God for all that love has done;

Creator, Christ, and Spirit One. Amen.

DEDICATION PRAYER

* CLOSING HYMN

“Amazing Grace”

No. 401

BENEDICTION

BENEDICTORY RESPONSE

Go now in peace. Never be afraid. God will go with you each hour of every day.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true. Know God will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe. Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there watching from above. Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.

Scripture: John 20:19-31

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus and Thomas

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

The Purpose of This Book

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Word of God.

Thanks be to God.

New Revised Standard Version Updated Version

POSTLUDE

“Paeon for Easter”

Herbert Howells

You are invited to sit for the postlude.

* * * * *

“Our worship ends, let our service begin”

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Minister and Teacher: Rev. John Hogue

Music Director: Joel Pierce

Those serving you today:

Ushers: Jan Shaw & Judith Sutter

Reader: Becky Lenz

Flowers: Jan Shaw

Online Streaming: Jenny Surgenor

Please join us for fellowship, coffee or tea, and refreshments in Fellowship Hall following worship.

Please take note of the colored paper prayer slips in the pew rack. These are for you to write a word or phrase of prayer or concerns. Fold it and place it in the offering plate. It will only be shared with Rev. John.

Happy April Birthday to Anne Harris, Harriet Matthey, Meg Skidmore, Linda Wallace & Susan Zimmerman

Help Yourself Shelf Wish List

* jarred spaghetti sauce * 1lb. white rice * drink mixes * canned chicken * tuna *
* cereal * SPAM * mayo * baked beans * toothpaste * dish soap * cat litter *

ANNOUNCEMENTS

April 19th Auction

Donations for April 19th Auction-

Got a talent to share or a hidden treasure in your closet? We're looking for high-quality items and unique experiences for our upcoming church auction! From themed gift baskets to home-baked treats, to gift cards to your favorite restaurant, your generosity helps us fundraise! Please fill out this form if you'd like to donate: <https://forms.gle/r5ver4fF9i6Xwwhh7>

For any questions contact Sarah Whitfield (sarahmariewhitfield@gmail.com) or Lisa Hargreaves (runawaylisah@gmail.com)

Church World Service (CWS) Kit Program

Please complete and return all kits to church by **Sunday, April 19**.

If you have questions, please contact the CWS Team:

Sally Howe, Joan Shea, Anne Harris, Ann Crispin & Nancy Roby.

Reminder: Hilary will be out of the office (visiting her family in Texas) April 20th-29th.

Spring Cleaning! April 25th 9:00am-12:00pm

Purse Auction- Saturday May 2nd, beginning at 10:00am. If you have a new or gently used purse you would like to donate to the Organ Society fundraiser, please drop it off in the church office, with your name on it.

Bring a Friend Sunday, May 3rd-In the spirit of Derby Sunday, wear a hat &/or bright colors (optional). Bring a Friend worship will be followed with Starbuck's coffee, and treats, in Fellowship Hall.

Coming Up This Week

Monday, April 13

Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00-12:00pm

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Mah Jongg 6:00 – 8:30pm

Tuesday, April 14

Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00-12:00pm

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Sheepscot Valley Chorus 7:00 – 9:00pm

Wednesday, April 15

Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00-12:00pm

Office Hours 10:00am – 2:00pm

Organ Society 9:30am

Feed Our Scholars packing 11:00am off Wiscasset Spring Break

Sunday, April 19

Sunday Worship 10:00am

Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall following Worship

Time & Talent Auction 12:00pm

First Congregational Church UCC
PO Box 350, 28 High Street, Wiscasset, ME 04578

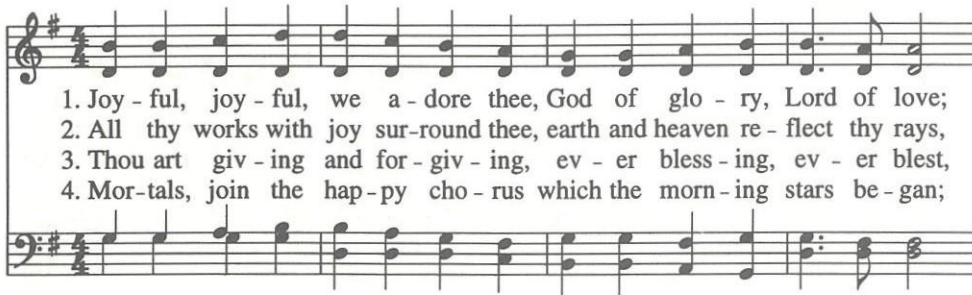
Minister and Teacher: Rev. John Hogue
revjohnwiscassetucc@gmail.com
Pastoral Care – 207 955-0055

Music Director: Joel Pierce
Sexton: Mary McKinney
Office Administrator: Hilary Atwood

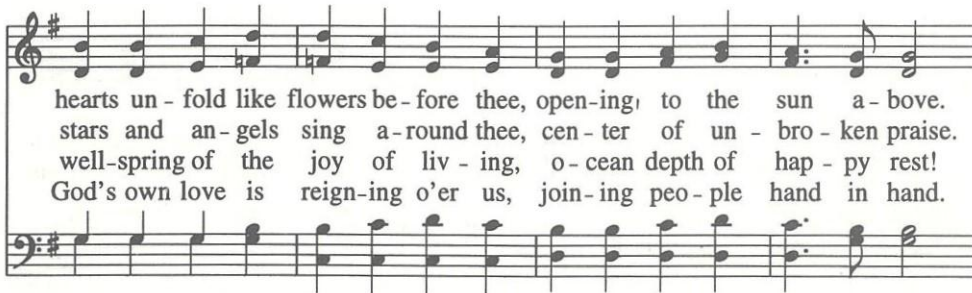
Church Office Email – fccw@myfairpoint.net
Church Office Phone – 207 882-7544
Church Website – www.uccwiscasset.org

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

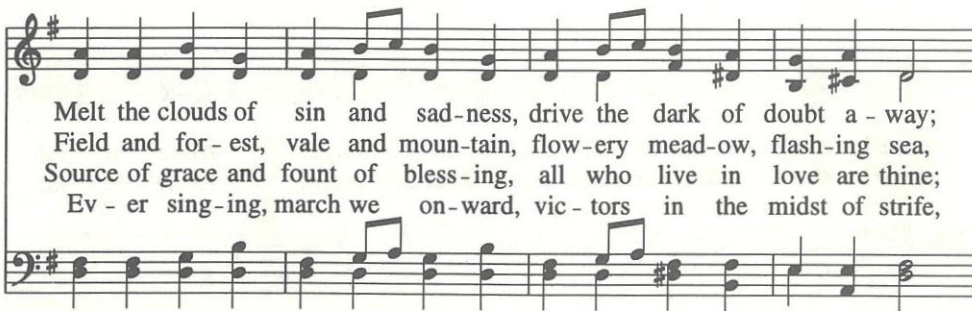
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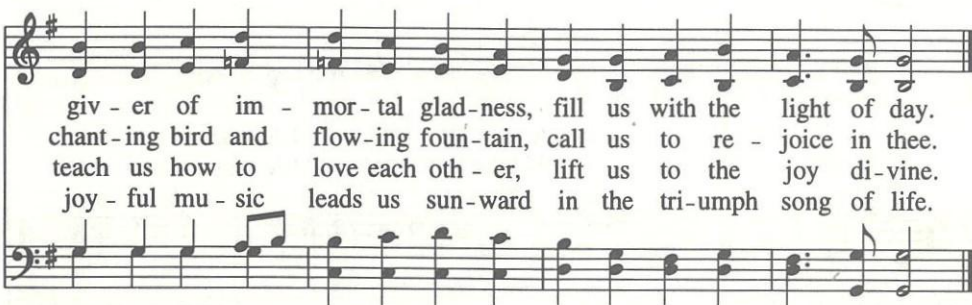
1. Joy - ful, joy - ful, we a - dore thee, God of glo - ry, Lord of love;
2. All thy works with joy sur-round thee, earth and heaven re - flect thy rays,
3. Thou art giv - ing and for - giv - ing, ev - er bless - ing, ev - er blest,
4. Mor - tals, join the hap - py cho - rus which the morn - ing stars be - gan;



hearts un - fold like flowers be - fore thee, open - ing, to the sun a - bove.
stars and an - gels sing a - round thee, cen - ter of un - bro - ken praise.
well - spring of the joy of liv - ing, o - cean depth of hap - py rest!
God's own love is reign - ing o'er us, join - ing peo - ple hand in hand.



Melt the clouds of sin and sad - ness, drive the dark of doubt a - way;
Field and for - est, vale and moun - tain, flow - ery mead - ow, flash - ing sea,
Source of grace and fount of bless - ing, all who live in love are thine;
Ev - er sing - ing, march we on - ward, vic - tors in the midst of strife,



giv - er of im - mor - tal glad - ness, fill us with the light of day.
chant - ing bird and flow - ing foun - tain, call us to re - joice in thee.
teach us how to love each oth - er, lift us to the joy di - vine.
joy - ful mu - sic leads us sun - ward in the tri - umph song of life.

WORDS: Henry van Dyke, 1907, alt.
MUSIC: Ludwig van Beethoven, 1824; adapt. Edward Hodges, 1864

HYMN TO JOY
87.87D

I Danced in the Morning

(Lord of the Dance)

Unison

1. I danced in the morn-ing when the world was be-gun, and I
 2. I danced for the scribe and the phar - i - see, but they
 3. I danced on the Sab-bath and I cured the lame, the
 *4. I danced on a Fri - day when the sky turned black, it's
 5. They cut me down and I leapt up high; —

* Stanza 4, up to bracket (7), may be sung in F minor

danced in the moon and the stars and the sun, and I
 would not dance and they would-n't fol - low me; I
 ho - ly peo - ple said it was a shame; they
 hard to dance with the dev - il on your back; they
 I am the life that - 'll nev - er, nev - er die; I'll

came down from heav - en and I danced on the earth; at
 danced for the fish - er - men, for James and John, they
 whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high, and
 bur - ied my bo - dy and they thought I'd gone, 7 but
 live in you if you'll live in me; —

Beth - le - hem I had my birth.
 came with me there and the Dance went on.
 left me there on a cross to die.
 I am the Dance and I still go on.
 I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

WORDS: Sydney Carter, 1963

MUSIC: Shaker melody; adapt. and harm. Sydney Carter, 1963

Sydney Carter brings us back to the medieval, joyous tradition of a dancing Savior — dancing being a metaphor for living life in the fullest sense.

LORD OF THE DANCE
 Irr. w. refrain

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 admin. Hope Publishing Co.

Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound 401

1. A - maz - ing grace! How sweet the sound that
 2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and
 3. Through man - y dan - gers, toils and snares I
 4. My God has prom - ised good to me, whose
 5. When we've been there ten thou - sand years, bright

saved and set me free! I once was lost, but
 grace my fears re - lieved; how pre - cious did that
 have al - read - y come; 'tis grace has brought me
 word my hope se - cures; God will my shield and
 shin - ing as the sun, we've no less days to

now am found; was blind, but now I see.
 grace ap - pear the hour I first be - lieved!
 safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
 por - tion be as long as life en - dures.
 sing God's praise than when we'd first be - gun.

WORDS: St. 1-4, John Newton, 1779, alt.; St. 5, *A Collection of Sacred Ballads*, 1790
 MUSIC: Shaw and Spilman's *Columbian Harmony*, Cincinnati, 1829; harm. FCC, 1997

NEW BRITAIN
 CM

Persistence Holy Humor

Sunday April 12, 2026

John 20:19-31

There's something almost comical—holy, unexpected laughter that is rather kind of comical—about this scene. The disciples are huddled together behind locked doors. Not cracked open. Not “let's just keep an eye out.” Locked. Bolted. Fear has them barricaded like a camp in the North Woods during a storm that won't let up. Then—without knocking, without so much as rattling the handle—Jesus just shows up. If it weren't so sacred, it would be funny. You can almost imagine someone jumping out of their sandals. Maybe Peter blurts out something half-formed like a Mainer caught off guard at the general store: “Ayuh—how'd you get in here?” Then Jesus says, “Peace be with you.”

That's divine humor right there.

Not the kind that mocks—but the kind that gently overturns everything we thought we understood. The kind that says: You locked the door, but you forgot—resurrection doesn't need hinges. The disciples were likely afraid for their own lives, afraid of their uncertain futures. Perhaps the last person the disciples wanted to meet on that evening was Jesus, risen from the dead to confront them with their failures.

In Maine, folks know about preparing for storms. You stack wood, latch windows, double-check the generator. You do what you can. But every now and then, a storm still finds its way in—through a crack, under a door, across a roof you thought was solid.

The disciples did the same thing with fear. They locked the doors to keep danger out. But they also, without realizing it, locked hope out too. And here comes Jesus—alive, bearing scars—and slipping right past their defenses like morning fog rolling in off the coast. There's a kind of divine laughter in that moment—not loud, not mocking—but full of grace. A quiet chuckle that says: “You thought fear could keep me out?”

Jesus had promised to send another Advocate -Holy Spirit who would be with them forever. Now he fulfills that promise. In an act of new creation, he breathes into his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Advocate or “Spirit of truth” will teach them, remind them of all that Jesus has said to them, and guide them into all truth. As many interpreters have demonstrated, “sin” in John’s Gospel is not primarily a moral category; rather, it is fundamentally unbelief, the refusal to receive the revelation of God in the person of Jesus. Jesus is not giving his disciples some special power to decide whose sins will be forgiven and whose will not. Rather, he is further specifying what it means to be sent, to make known the love of God that Jesus himself has made known. As people come to know and abide in Jesus, they will be “released” from their sins. If, however, those sent by Jesus fail to bear witness, people will remain stuck in their unbelief; their sins will be “retained” or “held onto”. The stakes of this mission are very high indeed.

For some reason (we are not told why), Thomas was absent and missed out on this first Sunday evening encounter with the risen Jesus. Although he has gotten a bad rap as “doubting Thomas,” he asks for nothing more than the others have already received: to see Jesus, wounds and all. The wonder of this story is that Jesus shows up again one week later to provide exactly what Thomas needs. Thomas responds with the highest Christological confession of anyone in the Gospel. His is not simply a doctrinal confession, but a statement of trust and relationship: “My Lord and my God!”, that is Thomas. He gets remembered as “Doubting Thomas,” but if we’re honest, he’s just the only one brave enough to say out loud what everyone else was thinking. “Unless I see... unless I touch... I’m not buying it.” That’s not cynicism—that’s Maine practicality. It’s like someone telling you in February that spring is just around the corner while you’re still shoveling two feet of snow. You’d say, “I’ll believe it when I see the mud.” Then Jesus shows up again. Same room. Same locked doors. Same greeting: “Peace be with you.” But this time, he turns to Thomas—and you can almost hear the gentle humor in his voice: “Go ahead. Take a look. See these hands? This side? I’m not offended by your doubt.” There’s something deeply human—and quietly funny—about the way Jesus meets Thomas exactly where he is. No lecture. No scolding. Just an invitation.

We tend to forget that for the first disciples, there was fear, doubt, pain, and confusion before there was understanding and joy at what had taken place on that day. The natural thing to do when we are

feeling anxious or threatened is to hunker down and lock the doors, to become focused on our own security rather than the risky mission to which we are called. The promise of this text is that Jesus cannot be stopped by our locked doors. Jesus comes to us as he came to the first disciples, right in the midst of our fear, pain, doubt, and confusion. He comes speaking peace, breathing into our anxious lives the breath of the Holy Spirit. What is more, he keeps showing up. That is persistence!! As he came back a week later for Thomas, Jesus kept coming back week after week among his gathered disciples — in the word, the water, the bread, and the wine — not wanting any to miss out on the life and peace he gives. And he keeps sending us out of our safe, locked rooms, into a world that, like us, so desperately needs his gifts of life and peace.

One of the things I enjoy finding are true-life stories of normal, everyday people that inspire and demonstrate the power and determination of the human spirit. Regardless of the socio-economic status of someone, it takes a special degree of willpower and dedication to finish a big project. It is also interesting how some individuals will keep a small object with them as a reminder of what is important to them to keep them motivated to complete the task at hand. Such was the case in this true story. In 1869, nine-year-old Liang Fu stood alone near Promontory Summit, Utah, days after the golden spike was driven into the ground. In his pocket, he carried a small stone — smooth on one side, flat like a hammer head. His father had used it to test iron.

His father had come from Guangdong and died weeks before the railroad's completion, crushed beneath a load of timber. The company left no marker. Just a final paycheck and a shovel. Liang was too young to work, too foreign to belong. But he stayed.

He wandered the empty rail bed, collecting bent nails and bits of broken chain. He slept in a burned-out tent and boiled rice with melted snow. Sometimes, he pressed the stone against his cheek, as if it might still hold warmth. One evening, a freedman named Ezra, also a worker, found Liang shivering under a boxcar. "Where's your loved ones, boy?"

Liang didn't speak English. He just showed the stone. Ezra took him in. Fed him stew. Called him "Li'l Hammer." Liang would go on to work in a blacksmith shop, then run his own foundry in Nevada. He cast every tool himself. In his office sat a single object on velvet: the stone. "It didn't build the railroad," he'd say, "but it told me I could finish something." Persistence like Jesus.

Laughter, then, is a holy act that connects us to one another and to God. Have you ever stood with family and friends, mourning the loss of a loved one? My experience is that, almost without fail, stories will start to be shared that erupt into laughter, which breaks through the tension of grief and opens the way to remembrance.

This Sunday is marked with Holy Humor because we need to remember that on Easter morning, God was laughing. Laughing at those who thought death could contain Jesus Christ. Laughing at sin and evil in the world's attempts to control it. On Easter morning, God declares that God will always have the last laugh. The greatest reversal ever – resurrection – has been accomplished. It's worth some laughter, because it borders on the ridiculous and absurd. And yet, at the same time, it's true. It is the bedrock of our faith, the hope to which we cling. It is good and right that we should laugh at the very idea of it. Not because we think it's stupid, but because our laughter is the only way we can overcome our fear of what if it is true after all. Laughter allows us to breathe into the possibility for just a moment and experience the raw joy it presents. In our laughter, God shows up, with that chuckle and nod that reminds us that with God, all things are possible. Thus we laugh again, because it all seems too good to be true. The news of resurrection – the promise of eternal life and unmerited grace – it overwhelms us with joy and laughter, a deep, resounding laughter that ripples throughout our whole body.

The thing about this kind of divine laughter isn't about jokes—it's about reversal.

- Fear turns into peace
- Doubt turns into confession
- Locked rooms turn into sending stations

Thomas, who said "I won't believe," becomes the one who says, "My Lord and my God!" That's the punchline of grace. Not a gotcha—but a transformation so complete it almost catches you off guard.

Think about it in this way like the old kind of humor you hear in small Maine towns—dry, understated. It goes like this- A fisherman comes back after a long day with nothing to show, and

someone at the dock says, “Well, looks like the fish had a meeting and decided against you today.” It’s not cruel. It’s just a way of naming reality without letting it crush you. That’s the kind of humor God seems to carry into this story. The disciples thought death had the final say. They thought the story was over. God says, in effect: “Well now... looks like death didn’t get the last word after all.” Maybe the question for us is this:

Where have we locked the doors?

- Grief we don’t want to face
- Fear of what’s next in the church or community
- Doubts we’re afraid to speak out loud

Maybe—just maybe—Christ is already standing there, on the other side of what we think is sealed shut. Not pounding. Not forcing. Just appearing... and saying, “Peace be with you.”

So this morning, we laugh, a little or a lot, in hopes of catching on to some of that divine joy that fills the empty tomb. Also to remind ourselves, even when things get difficult or seem impossible, that God is with us, and God is still laughing at the face of that which would otherwise bind us. What good news of great joy, indeed! And somewhere in that moment, if we listen closely, we might hear it— That quiet, divine laughter. Not at us, but for us. The laughter of resurrection that says: “You thought this was the end? Oh no... we’re just getting started and that is the persistence of God’s love. Amen.