April 1, 2018
The Presiding Bishop’s Easter Message

There is a passage in the 27th Chapter of Matthew’s gospel where religious leaders, political leaders come together once again after Jesus has been crucified and executed, after he had been buried in the tomb. Once again they come together to seal the tomb, to make sure not even a rumor of his resurrection will happen. And this is what some of them say:

“Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may go and steal him away and tell the people he has been raised from the dead. And the last deception will be the worse than the first.”

It is easy to overlook, and sometimes convenient to forget, that Jesus was executed, Jesus was crucified by an unholy alliance of religion, politics, and economic self-interest. Politics represented in Pontius Pilate, governor of the Roman Empire, representative of that very empire and all of its power. King Herod, who heard Jesus at one of the trials, representative of the Herodian and economic self-interest at the time. The Chief Priest, representative of religious aristocracies who had a vested interest in the status quo. These three powers came together - economic, religious and political - to crucify the one who taught love the lord your God, love your neighbor, and actually live that way.

The truth is the message of Jesus was unsettling to the world then as it is unsettling to the world now. And yet that very message is the only source of hope in life for the way of the cross, the way of unselfish living, the way of sacrificial living, seeking the good, the welfare of the other before one’s own unenlightened self-interest. That way of the cross is the way of love. That is the nature of love. And that way is the only hope for the
entire human family. The reality is the way of Jesus was a threat to the way that the world is, and hope for the way the world can and will be.

But on that third day after the crucifixion, when by the titanic power of God, by the power of the love of God, Jesus was raised from the dead. God sent a message and declared that death does not have the last word. Hatred does not have the last word. Violence does not have the last word. Bigotry does not have the last word. Sin, evil do not have the last word. The last word is God, and God is love.

On our pilgrimage here, we stopped and spent two days in Jordan. In Amman, Jordan, we were able to spend some sacred and blessed and painful time with Iraqi Christians. These are Christians, many of whom are Anglican, who have fled their country in Iraq because of war and violence and hatred and desecration. They have given up everything, refusing to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ. And there in Jordan, with the help of the Anglican Church there and many other relief agencies, they are at least safe, hoping to find safe and permanent homes in other countries.

In the course of our conversations, and listening to them, at one point I found myself quoting a hymn, a song that many folk have heard around Easter, certainly in our country. And I didn’t expect a response. You probably know how it goes – it says, “because he lives,” referring to Jesus and his resurrection, “because he lives, I can face tomorrow.” When I quoted that song, those who have lost their homes, people who have lost everything except life itself, those who have lost loved ones, actually responded to the words of that song. When I said, “Because He lives I can face tomorrow.” When I said Jesus is alive, He’s been raised from the dead, I saw them lift up their heads and respond with the words amen, hallelujah.

My brothers and sisters, evil could not stop him. Death could not stop him. Violence could not stop him. For the love of God, the heart of God, the reality of God is stronger than anything else. And Jesus really rose from the dead on that first resurrection morning.

God love you. God bless you. And, may this Easter season be the first day of the rest of our lives. Amen.