*The Lamb At the Center*

Revelation 7:9-17

It has been a rough week so I thought I would leave you with some images this week from the book of Revelation. I find it interesting that in the passage from Revelation for this week we have an odd expression of Jesus as the Lamb who shepherds those who have worked in life the way Jesus worked in life, caring for others and rejecting the ways of the world that promote power, prestige and desire to accumulate material wealth. If we think about that image, we realize that a lamb is usually the one the shepherd cares for and protects. So what is a lamb doing shepherding? A Lamb has no power and is one of the most vulnerable in the flock. It cannot defend itself. It’s kind of a puzzling term in John’s visions of the thrones that God and Jesus it upon. I puzzled about that between bouts of coughing, pain and fatigue this week. I looked up into the sky, saw a plane working its way across the sky and remembered what it was like to fly. Flying in a plane offers a unique opportunity to soar above the clouds we generally see quite differently than from the ground. It was remembering the storms that these images came to me. Beneath those clouds there could be storms raging and rain falling. On the ground a storm comes in to view as a dark gathering on the distant horizon. As it gets closer, the air begins to smell of dampness and the winds begin to pick up. Perhaps the distant sound of thunder signals to the bystander that soon shelter must be sought. Lightning certainly sends people scattering for protection. The rain begins gently before it breaks into the fury of a full-fledged storm. All kinds of destructive things happen depending on the severity of the storm. Winds drive the rain, branches fall, leaves twirl and flowers bend and sometimes break. Then, as the fury of the storm subside, a gently dripping continues, clouds begin to break, shots of sunshine emerge and sometimes a rainbow appears. The earth has been refreshed and life goes on, richer for the downpour. Plants and animals have been provided new sources of life giving water.

In a storm it isn’t the wind or lightning or drenching downpours that best provides what the earth needs. It is the steady, gentle rains that have a chance to soak into the soil that provide the greatest relief and replenishment. Sometimes we try to take the world by storm, try to counter the storm with our own storms, pounding it with the winds of our impatience the lightning of our power, and the loud thunder of our protests and demands. We fight the winds with the barriers we have built to keep debris and unwanted elements of life out, especially those people we want to have little to do with, those who remind us of the inequities in life. In spite of all our efforts to keep unwanted forces out of our lives, we still get pounded. We still get shattered by the storm’s fury. Hurts and disappointments pummel us and we emerge from the storm battered and worn. And we try to pick up the pieces and wait for the next storm, once again building barricades that we think will protect us.

But when we live a life of faith, when we allow Jesus to be at the center of our experiences, we know that amidst the fury of the storm, gentle, soaking rains of living water fall and replenish us. We soak in the wonder that is the quiet way of faith, the sure steady presence of one who helps weather us through the storm that batters and bruises us and bring us the life giving, gentle rains that sustain and nurture us. Without this steady rain, the storm would just wash over us, its pounding rain would run off down the hills into the drains, and our lives would just have one more example of how a storm can rob us of strength and defeat us. If we experience too many of life’s storms without the slow, steady rain, we can become hardened and cynical and far too self-protecting.

The slow, gentle rain of our lives is the Lamb who stands at the center of our faith. His way is not the way of the world. He does not bulldoze his way into our lives, trying to get us to believe with mighty blows and earth shattering miracles. He winds his way into our hearts gently, sometimes in the calm after the storm, sometimes in the gentle rain smell before a storm, sometimes in a quiet moment of sunshine, or the surrounding blanket of fog.

It is interesting that amidst all the images of plagues and disasters and other violence that John provides in Revelation, there is this image of the Lamb at the center. Jesus came to us, not as a soldier, or conqueror or even a man of power and prestige, but as a gentle man vulnerable to the whims of those who could not see his way and those who were threatened by his new way of thinking. This gentle man is the one who quiets the storms of our lives and diminishes their power to destroy us.

I remember a particular storm a few years ago when I visited my mother. It was an emotional roller coaster ride of taking care of my mother, of watching her weaken, of being unable to prevent her from falling and injuring both of us, of seeing the sadness and fears of my father as we called EMS to take her to the hospital when she fell. It was a helpless feeling to see my mother decline. And yet, through it all the gentle rain of Jesus fell, reassuring faith kept me struggling and in that faith, I could reassure both of them when their fears began to pound away at them. The Lamb at the center held it all together for us in his own quiet way.

That’s the image I leave with you this morning. This gentle Lamb shepherds us. Both images do fit together. We can remember how he was led through a violent storm, and in weathering that storm is now able to send the gentle rains of living water that will see us through.