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John 14:23
Acts 14:8-18
Revelation 21:22-22:5
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Power! Black Power, Girl Power, Power to the people, Power-Puff Girls, nuclear power. Power-hungry. Power outages. Power is a word that pervades our very existence. We even have lines of metal cable bringing it into our homes and our church. The arena of power, though, is not restricted to the likes of Indian Point, or even board rooms and unjust detainee prisons abroad. Power is involved in all human relationships, from Adam and Eve on down. “Wherever two or three are gathered together, there are differences of power among them,” (*The Power of the Lamb*, Ewing). Welcome to your Mothers’ Day sermon. Please wait until the end to think that I am preaching on *Mommie Dearest* rather than Mother Teresa.

On a hot summer day while I was working at the Episcopal Church in Florence, Italy I was invited to have lunch with a group of monks who were part of the Community of Jerusalem. This was a renowned community, and I welcomed the opportunity. Under the previous pope, the Community of Jerusalem was even entrusted to care and guard the Papal Reserve Sacrament. During lunch, I sat with the abbot of the community. After exhausting my Italian and his English and exchanging pleasantries, somehow we began to discuss theology and church doctrine, not un-divisive issues for Romans and Anglicans. Even worse, I have to say, was my tendency, because I did not know the language well, to bumble past nuance and blaze into polarities. After somewhat heated debates about our churches and our authority or lack thereof, the conversation turned to what power we have as ministers and what we received in our training to deal with such power. The abbot, as a Brother and as an ordained priest, claimed that he had no power over anyone to do anything, not in the confessional or even the pulpit (no comments please). Even if someone came to him for help in a vulnerable state, even if the person was a child, even if the person was a monk he oversaw, none of these, for the abbot constituted a differentiation in power. Worse yet, because he could not see the differentiation in power, he could not see the possibility of abuse of power. He claimed that God was the only being with any power.

Power. Power has been defined as, “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his [or her] own will.. [even in the face of] resistance,” (Max Weber). It’s the ability to get your way, even when others don’t want to yield. And power pervades every level of our, and I would add that abbot’s, existence. Perhaps because we are on a daily basis reminded of abuses of power, in churches, in our government, in our wars, and in presidential candidate’s expensive haircuts, power and what power means for Christians seem like important topics for us this morning.

Power is also a theme in our readings for today. The Book of Revelation as a whole, after all, is a book about the experiences of powerlessness that some Christians had in the first Century. Many fundamentalists argue that the Book of Revelation is about the future and attempting to predict what will happen when God comes back in ultimate power like the Terminator coming to wipe out an enemy. They even believe that you can predict the time and place of such an end, if

you only crack the code. Hence the bumper stickers, "In case of Rapture, this car will be without a driver." And those in response, "In case of rapture can I have your car." But the book of Revelation is better understood as a way for First Century Christians to dream about and hope for what the world would be like if Jesus, or those who follow Jesus, were in control and in power. After all, the First Christians mostly had the experience of being out of control. The first Christians were most often Jews who lived in Roman controlled territories. Many were hated by their Jewish families and synagogues and certainly by their governments. They were without power, and they awaited Jesus' return to transform the world. They were like the slaves of America's past, singing out in hope for divine rescue.

And because Revelation is a story about a group of powerless individuals, it is also a book that holds truth for any people who have been abused by the power of others or who want to look at power through a Christian perspective. And that truth is the role that God plays in the power of our world. In the book, we have two forces working toward different ends, jockeying for control. There is the completely good power characterized by the figure of a lamb. This lamb is innocent and looks as though it has been slaughtered and has wounds. This animal is more like a real lamb-chop than the puppet. And there is also pure evil, the beast, the horsemen, and those beings who might even appear to be good but are not. They also seek to control the universe. So far, no surprises. It is very Star Wars: Luke and Darth. And like Star Wars, in Revelation, the good power triumphs over evil. But unlike galactic battles, it is not through some horrid violent battle. It is simply that the power of the lamb, the power of nonviolence and a radically self-sacrificing, enemy forgiving love is overwhelming. The light of the lamb shines forth in a new, peace-filled Holy City ushered in by all the nations and the people. It is a new creation and a redemption of the world. And at the center of that redemption, is a self-effacing, slaughtered Lamb. Easter is the resurrection of our Lord. Revelation is the resurrection of our world.

And that Lamb is our answer of Christianity to questions of power in our lives. For a Christian, we aim not to claim power as a way of making the world meet our needs. A slaughtered lamb is not in the position to make such demands. Instead, the power that the Lamb is, as stated by Dean Ewing of General Seminary, "characterized by vulnerability rather than self-protection, by acceptance rather than control, by honesty and truth rather than propaganda and deceit, and by steadfastness rather than grappling after a quick decision... The power of Christ is always concerned with allowing freedom, even if that concern for freedom involves facing the personal suffering of oneself for the freedom of another," (*The Power of the Lamb*, Ewing). On this Mother's Day, I want to point out that what we often love about our Mother, or at least want from them, is this sort of power.

This different, Mothering sort of power might seem to be weak, but that's just the beast talking. The power of the Lamb is the position of ultimate grace and power, because in the end, at least in the story of Revelation and in our Christian hope, the power of the Lamb triumphs over all other sorts of power. The power that seeks only for personal gain is really powerless.

Instead of being about the end fo the world, the book of Revelation is a book of hope, and by that I mean real hope, not just cheap grace. God is not going to come down and sort the good from the bad at the end of all time. God also is not going to come down as the fairy god-mother,

making all of our dreams come true, taking Cinderella to the ball. It's not hoping to win at power-ball. God instead chooses to come down as non-retaliatory, sacrificed Lamb, a lamb who provides light to the people, a light that we will all eventually see and follow. And as we begin to see the light, we begin to imagine and envision what our world can be with this new sort of power.

We are called to remember during the Easter season that what we believe has ultimate importance. And we are invited to reflect that meaning in our lives is not what we get or what we demand, or what someone gives us, or how our lives worked out to our greatest desires or our worst fears. It's about what we give, how we love even the un-loveable, how we make peace with others even those who hurt us, and how we reflect the power and light of the Lamb from God's heavenly city.

Lamb Power!