**Proper 29, Year B**

**Nov. 25, 2018**

**St. James, Wheat Ridge**

**By the Rev. Becky Jones**

From the minute the plane landed at Boston’s Logan Airport

and they discovered that everyone on board, including the crew,

had mysteriously died during the flight,

they HAD me.

That was the pilot episode of the Fox TV show “Fringe,”

And I was a faithful watcher through all five seasons.

For those of you who DON’T waste your time

on stupid TV science fiction,

and so may not know what I’m talking about,

let me fill you in.

The show chronicled the exploits

of eccentric scientist Dr. Walter Bishop;

his brilliant son, Peter;

FBI Special Agent Olivia Dunham,

and the work of the FBI Fringe Division.

This secret branch of the FBI investigates

a series of bizarre occurrences

related to mysteries surrounding a parallel universe.

This universe is almost but not exactly like our own,

and it exists in another dimension.

It seems that because of some experiment gone awry

the two universes have started occasionally

colliding with each other,

often with ghastly results.

Because when two things attempt to occupy the same space

at the same time,

Something’s gotta give.

When another world starts breaking into OUR world,

Things in our world can start to crumble.

Now this is all just Hollywood fantasy of course.

As far as I know, there IS no FBI Fringe Division,

and no invading shape shifters from another universe

bent on the destruction of humanity.

But I do believe with all my heart

that there IS another world that co-exists with our own,

and it’s breaking in all around us.

Jesus speaks of this in his conversations with Pilate.

“My kingdom,” he says, “is not from THIS world.”

Jesus reigns in that parallel universe

that we call the Kingdom of God.

But the Kingdom of God is not just some far-off imaginary place that awaits us after we die.

The Kingdom of God also exists here, now,

right alongside our own world,

and you don’t have to be a mad scientist in order to detect it

or devise some complicated machine

in order to cross over and visit it.

All you have to do is open your eyes

and you can see a world very much –

but not EXACTLY –

like our own.

It’s got the same people, but they live by some different rules.

In the Kingdom of God,

the first have become last and the last have become first.

In the Kingdom of God,

debts have been forgiven, and slaves have been set free.

In the Kingdom of God, that which had grown old is made new,

that which had been cast down is raised up,

and all things are being brought to their perfection.

In the paradoxical Kingdom of God,

the King proclaims his kingship not from a throne,

but from a cross.

Today, on Christ the King Sunday,

we celebrate the reign of Christ as our King,

and our citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

For many people, Americans especially,

the image of Christ as King may be troublesome.

We live in a democracy,

and it’s hard for us to wrap our minds around

the whole concept of kingship.

So it may be helpful to know a little bit

about how Christ the King Sunday came to be.

It’s actually kind of a recent addition to our liturgical year.

It began in the Roman Catholic Church in 1925

and it entered Protestant churches during the 1960s,

as more and more churches began using a common lectionary.

It was Pope Pius XI who created a Sunday

on which to speak of Christ the King,

and it was he who suggested

that the readings we hear on this Sunday

speak of kingliness.

Why did he do it?

Because in Italy, in 1925,

the world desperately needed an image of Christ as King.

In 1925, Mussolini had been prime minister of Italy for three years

when he finally dropped all pretense of democracy

and declared himself dictator,

building a fascist police state.

In Germany, Hitler released *Mein Kampf*,

and his Nazi Party was growing in popularity.

It was the year that F. Scott Fitzgerald’s iconic novel,

*The Great Gatsby*, was published,

exploring the themes of class struggle,

excess wealth,

and the breakdown of the American dream during the Jazz Age.

In such a time as that,

Pius XI proclaimed

that even with all those new dictators

and false values

driving the world,

Christ was nevertheless King of the Universe,

and that Christians ought never doubt Christ’s authority.

The feast of Christ the king was then – and is now –

a symbol, a metaphor,

designed to be a statement of what truly matters

in frightening and broken times.

The victorious and exalted Christ,

the one who was and is and is to come,

the firstborn from among the dead,

it is THIS Christ who frees us from our sin.

And his is a power no earthly ruler can match.

Today, we still live in broken times.

False kings still drive the world.

But for those of us who proclaim that “Christ is King,”

means we also proclaim that Caesar is not.

To confess that Christ is king

means therefore that we must resist the powers and principalities

when they deny the reign and character and purposes of God.

To confess that Christ is King

is to refuse to obey the powers that deny humanity

to the refugee or the immigrant.

To confess that Christ is king

is to stand in solidarity with the poor,

with the oppressed,

with all those who suffer at the hands of tyrants

and those who embrace evil

because it is expedient to do so.

Yes, Jesus is a king unlike any other king.

And his kingdom is unlike any other,

for it is not of this world.

In the end, Pilate mocks Jesus and mocks the Jews.

Like so many authoritarians, he can never understand

that Jesus is a king unlike any king of this world.

Yet ultimately Pilate unknowingly speaks the truth.

He declares to the Jews, “Here is your king”

And over the cross Pilate places the announcement for all to see,

“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

But is he our king?

Are we willing to accept Jesus as our king?

We, too, are tempted by the allure and the power of the world.

In the end, we are told, the Jewish leaders rejected their faith

and bowed to the empire,

“We have no king but the emperor,” they said.

In what ways do we bow to the empire?

Do we live in the reign of God following the servant king?

Do we live lives that reflect that service?

Do we reach out to the least and the lost?

Do we seek to serve rather than be served?

Do we testify to the truth of God?

It is the truth that Jesus came to the world to bring love and forgiveness.

Are we citizens of that kingdom?

Or not?

Sadly, Christ’s kingdom

is a very unpopular kingdom

to be a part of these days.

And so we, who would take Christ’s name,

and like him be faithful witnesses

to the mercy of God,

find ourselves trapped in a paradox,

attempting to live in two worlds at the same time.

And when two things attempt to occupy the same space

at the same time,

Something’s gotta give.

When another world starts breaking into OUR world,

Things in our world can start to crumble.

Things like suspicion. Hatred. Xenophobia.

Doors that were locked start to open.

Voices that were silent begin to be heard.

Hearts that were hardened begin to grow more loving.

We are called to be faithful witnesses;

to witness to the One who showed power through weakness,

who showed strength through vulnerability,

who established justice through mercy,

and who built the kingdom of God

by embracing a confused, violent world,

taking its pain into his own body,

dying the death it sought,

and rising again

to remind us that light is stronger than darkness,

love is stronger than hate,

and that with God,

all things are possible.

Thanks be to God for this message,

as the world has never needed it more.

And during this time after Thanksgiving,

let us give thanks

for all who proclaim the radical gospel of Christ,

the King so different than the world’s kings

and the One who testifies to the truth

and calls us to do the same.

Amen.