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St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Cleveland, Ohio)  
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# Standing on the Border, Seeking Signs of the Kingdom

I have a fascination with borders. Those arbitrary lines that mark the precise location where one place ends and another begins. A few years ago I was on a long, cross-country road trip. And I took a detour through Canada to visit the Haskell Free Library and Opera House. This particular landmark sits right on top of the border between Quebec and Vermont. There, I took a photo of my feet straddling a line of black tape. One foot in the United States and the other in Canada. Just so I could capture the experience of standing in two countries at the same time. In the language of faith, borders are often described as 'liminal places.' Places of transition and transformation in our spiritual lives. And it just so happens that this morning, we find ourselves on the edge of a border. A border in liturgical time. Today is the Last Sunday after Pentecost – the very last Sunday of the liturgical year. A new year, and the season of Advent, lie just ahead on the horizon.

This 'border Sunday' is also known as 'Christ the King Sunday.' A day that celebrates Jesus as the king of our lives and of the entire world. Indeed our friends in the Roman Catholic Church call this feast, "The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe." You may not realize it, but we proclaim Jesus' kingship each week when we say the Nicene Creed. When we say that Jesus has "ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the father." That may sound like we're making a statement about Jesus's location. It's really much more than that, though.

What we're really saying is that Jesus has dominion and authority over the whole of creation.

That's an outrageous claim, if you really think about it. If Jesus, the "King of glory, king of peace," has authority over the whole creation, why doesn't our world look more glorious and peaceful? More than 800 million people still go hungry every day. Refugee crises are unfolding all over the world. Climate change is crippling our planet. We are as politically fractured and divided as ever. Egregious incidences of racial injustice continue unabated. If the 'King of peace' truly reigns at the Father's right hand, why are things in our world such a mess?

One way to answer this question, is that we're waiting for Christ to return. When Christ "comes again in glory," then he'll restore creation and make all things right. That certainly seems to be the message of our readings this morning. Both the prophet Daniel and the book of Revelation point us to the second coming of Christ with vivid imagery. Daniel proclaims, "I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven." And the Revelation to John echoes with, "Look! He is coming with the clouds; [and] every eye will see him." But here's the thing. The church confesses that Jesus is Lord of all creation *now* – not at some distant point in the future, but now. We will end our worship this morning singing these words: "At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him King of glory now" ....King of glory *now*. So how can we make such a claim?

As Christians, we stand with our feet planted in two worlds at once. We live in the time in-between. The time of 'already' *and* 'not yet.' Christ has already won the victory. Christ already reigns. But his kingdom in all its fullness has not yet been realized. We are still waiting for Christ to return to bring God's plans to completion. And yet, somehow, that promised future breaks into our world even now. Too often, we miss the signs of Christ's reign because we're looking for the wrong kind of king and the wrong kind of kingdom. Jesus isn't the like any other king we know. His kingdom isn't like any other kingdom. As he says to Pilate in our Gospel reading for today, "My kingdom is not of this world." Kings in this world are born in palaces. Our King, King Jesus, was born in a stable. Kings in this world are wealthy, attended by nobility. Our King is a Galilean peasant who hung out with outcasts and misfits. Earthly kings wear crowns adorned with jewels. Our king wore a crown made of thorns. When earthly kings die, they lie in state and the masses come to pay their respects. Our King died hanging from a cross – utterly abandoned and alone. Kings of this world evidence their power in dominance and might. Our king shows his power in weakness and humility. No, his kingdom is not *of* this world. So the signs of Christ's reign are easily hidden from our eyes. But the Kingdom of God is breaking through, even now. Like a mustard seed, it grows, even when the world tries to uproot it or mow it down. There are glimpses of this kingdom all around us, if only we have eyes to see.

I spotted a glimpses of the kingdom this past week while reading the news. There is a migrant crisis taking place near the border of Belarus and Poland. Throngs of refugees, largely from the Middle East, are desperately seeking asylum in the EU. News reports show photos of border guards using water cannons and tear gas to keep the migrants from crossing into Poland. But a fledging movement of resistance has begun to form. Nearby residents have been so moved by compassion for these migrants, they've begun putting green lights in their windows to identify their homes as safe havens. To quote a report from the Vatican's news outlet, "Those green lights [send a signal that], behind those illuminated windows, sits a bowl of hot soup and a blanket ready for any who pass through, regardless of passports or visas." These green lights of compassion, signaling refuge and welcome, are signs of Christ's reign shining in the oppressive, dark night. Much closer to home, we get glimpses of Christ's Kingdom right here at St. Paul's. This past week, I had the joy of working on a project with several of the youth of our parish. We assembled care packages for Afghan Refugees who will soon be settling in Cleveland. These care packages, made possible by your financial gifts, contain pillows, a comforter, and clean sheets. Simple gestures of hospitality, to welcome those who have escaped oppression at the hands of earthly kings. Tangible signs of Christ's kingdom. Breaking through, even now. And then just yesterday, in this very nave, we celebrated not one, but two weddings. Four lives joined together to be, in the words of our prayers, "a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world...so that unity may overcome estrangement...and joy conquer despair." Signs of Christ's kingdom in our very midst.

We might be citizens of two worlds. But we have one - and only one – true king.

A king whose throne is a cross. A king whose power is shown in weakness. A king who came as a servant, and give himself for our redemption. This Christ the King has promised to come again one day. And in the meantime, he gives us a foretaste of that kingdom. In the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Right here, at this holy table, that sits on the border between heaven and earth.

Amen.