

When my oldest child started middle school, we must have had a run in about some thing or other, I must have said “no” about something, because I clearly remember him saying he couldn’t wait to be an adult so he could be free. He wanted to be the one to make all the decisions for his own life, he didn’t want anyone telling him what to do.

Unlike my oldest, I didn’t have anyone telling me what to do when I was a teenager. I’m generation X, and for a lot of folks my age there was almost too much freedom. Born to parents who rejected the structured, disciplined, and traditional worldview of their parents, many of us were left almost entirely to our own devices. Both parents were out at work all day, and we were pretty much left to it. At the time it was fantastic. So when my oldest told me he just wanted to be free, I knew that feeling, and when I was his age, I loved it.

But, being “free,” doing pretty much whatever I wanted, didn’t set me up well for life. Being “free” is all well and good when things are going ok, but when things get tough, during times of stress or struggle, conflict or instability, all of which is unavoidable in this life, I was completely unequipped, I didn’t know how to move forward, I didn’t know what choices to make, it was easy to slide into hopelessness and be afraid of the future.

This isn’t just a personal experience, it can also happen to communities, or countries. It’s one of the reasons folks choose to abdicate their freedom in favor of following a strong leader, we can choose to have our world narrowed and limited so it all feels more controllable. This is how seduction by charismatic cult leaders works, or authoritarians or populist leaders:

if the future feels uncertain, they know we can easily default to wanting someone strong and powerful to step in and fix it for us.

One hundred years ago, when the Pope created this feast day, folks in Europe were under some serious stress. The first world war was catastrophic, there was enormous loss of life, and the depression that followed brought with it horrendous economic hardship. Through millennia of muscle memory, folks in many European nations saw the solution in their version of a King. Authoritarian leaders rose to power on a wave of violence and social exclusion and absolute control, all of which promised a better future.

We long to be free, and yet when life gets really hard, we'll abdicate our freedom and trust a "king" to figure it all out for us.

But there is no "it" – we are the world that we live in, we are the world we have inherited and today are creating with our choices and actions. If we want a better future it's 'we' who have to change. Any "king" of this world is of it, too, just as we are – we can't be led into a transformed future, we have to choose it and create it together. But that's hard and most of us don't feel well-equipped for the task, so we're somewhat stuck in a cycle, repeating the mistakes of our ancestors, hoping we will be saved by *someone*; and not realizing we each actually have all we need for the task, we have the power, we have the imagination, and we've been given the Way. It's *us* who have to figure it out, if we can get free.

True freedom isn't being able to do whatever we want to do, it's not about our individual autonomy; freedom *is* living into the power we're given by God to choose, act, and live in such a way that brings us into fullness of life.

Freedom is making choices that carry us all into greater life, as God intends, and this is never just for our own selves but also for those we share this life with. Freedom is the Kingdom of God, and God's kingdom stands in opposition to any kingdom or empire here, in this world...

... because ours is a world that's absolutely human-made. It's been built so folks can *feel* free, but it's a world built not for fullness of life for all, but for the accumulation of wealth and power and material comforts. So our world is competitive, full of conflict, there's hierarchy and exclusion, arrogance, entitlement, violence. And fear. Life in this world is for progress, production, development, growth. And this world is triumphant as it takes and claims power over people and planet.

This world we've created and are still creating is one entirely separate from God. We can feel free, but we are enslaved by it. Our choices and actions are driven by the powerful forces of this world; we want no limits on our life, but the freedom we think we have actually keeps us trapped and disempowered. Living only in and for this world keeps us neck deep in sin, neck deep in choices and actions that keep us apart from God, keep us separate from one another.

Christ the King has us remember our God-given power, despite the world, and has us take our responsibility for the world-making that's happening today, in this generation, that we're a part of, despite the world. Christ the King has us remember that transforming the world will never be possible making adjustments here and there to the world as it is, transforming the world is the bringing about of God's Kingdom.

Christ the King shows us what it is to be truly free: Jesus lived perfect freedom by a life of radical generosity, relationship, humility, inclusion, healing, love; this is God's Kingdom reality.

‘King’ is a brilliantly subversive title for Christ, because Kingship here literally is the absolute opposite of Kingship in this world.

It tests our creative capacity to envision or imagine God’s Kingdom, but we can be confident it’s not this. ‘King’ in this world evokes injustice; it represents for us in this cultural moment, undeserved privilege and unchecked power. King evokes triumphalism and domination. ... Christ as King has us turn away from all we know Christ is not.

Freedom is living for God’s Kingdom, both already here and also still becoming. We may not yet know that freedom, what it feels like, yet, but we can be confident we know what it’s not, so we can start there. We may not be able to envision God’s peaceable Kingdom on earth, but we can be confident we know what it’s not, and we can start there.

If Jesus is King, Jesus, stripped, mocked and beaten before being brutally, publicly, executed, if Jesus is King we know what life in and for God’s Kingdom absolutely is not. It isn’t *for* status, or power over, it isn’t for wealth, or trade, or economic growth, or technological progress or never-ending production or extraction, all of which come at great cost to life on this planet.

Kingdom life is relational above all else, it is healing and restoring – how this can and will transform the world is a mystery, but it’s this life we were created for, and we are free, despite the world, we are free and we do have the power to choose it and to participate in bringing it about.

It was Empire that gave Jesus the title of King, it was intended to be a final, belittling insult because of its absurdity. Instead, it's a title of hope and resistance, a title of revelation – it affirms that the Kingdom of God stands, in its great power, in absolute opposition to all the enslaving Kingdoms and Empires on earth ... from which, Christ the King, for freedom, has set us free.