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Title: Queen Mothers

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Scripture: [Luke 2:39-45](#)

Text: [2 Kings 11:1-3](#)

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Here we are on Mother's Day, a day which always comes with a lot of fanfare and at the same time, a lot of baggage. For some, it is the best day to come to worship because you have or had an incredible Mother. Your mother was like June Cleaver or Carol Brady, or to use more recent TV mothers, Clair Dunphy or Beth Pearson.

Your mom was a super mom, the very best. So you come to say thank you, to crown her with recognition for her excellence and love. It is one of the reasons that attendance is always up on this weekend. Many of us are blessed.

Despite attendance being up, for some the day is hard. I know people who actually stay away because they are sad. They don't have a mother any longer. It's painful, particularly if your loss is recent. And it is extremely painful for mothers who have lost children. I hope you heard the prayers that we have offered up for you today.

Others find this day difficult because they wanted to be a mother but they couldn't or can't. It's hard for you. But it is hardest for those who didn't have a good mother; she was absent or hurtful. Mother wounds are real. Someone said a few years ago, "I looked through all the Hallmark cards and not one of them said, "Dear Mom, Thanks for nothing."¹ Some of you sitting here with deep wounds might want to buy that card.

All of which to say is that we are all over the place today. It's a minefield. Just saying the word mother is emotionally charged resulting in dozens of different feelings throughout every church in every sanctuary. This has caused a number of my colleagues to stop preaching about mothers on Mother's day.

But I'm not going to do that. Instead, in response to this wide range of feelings on Mother's Day, I'm going to address most of them by preaching

about two Queen Mothers, one who was the best mother and the other who was the worst. In fact, if you had a bad mom, she wasn't this bad. If you have some insecurities about how good a job you did or are doing as a mom, (and just about every mother I know does), compared to this bad Queen Mother you are a saint, you are the real queen.

When I say the Queen Mother, who comes to mind? Depending on your age you might say Elizabeth who was the Queen Mum to the current Queen of England, Elizabeth the II. She died in 2002 just four months shy of 102. Or, you might say Beyoncé, the Queen Bey. These are not the queen mothers we are going to look at.

Persons known as the Queen Mother show up in the Old Testament. It is a translation of a Hebrew word "gevira." Israel and Judah together had forty-one king, but never a queen, not in her own right or even a queen-consort, the queen by marriage. Most kings had lots of wives so it would be hard to choose which wife was queen and they didn't. But they did have "gevira", a queen mother who by position had great power and influence. The first and one of the most famous was Bathsheba. Solomon had a throne prepared for her to sit just to his right hand (1 Kings 2:9), to give him counsel and direction and advocate for the people. The queen mother was the most powerful woman in the kingdom. When a new king is installed in Judah, the queen mother's name is always included. All but 2 of the kings of Judah had a queen mother.²

The worst mother in the Bible is a queen mother, Athaliah. You may have never heard her name but by the time I get through telling her story, I think you will agree that she was the worst mom ever.

Athaliah lived around 850 BC about 100 years after the United Kingdom of Israel splits in two. Judah is the kingdom of the south with the capital being Jerusalem. Ten tribes make up the kingdom of Israel to the north. Athaliah was the daughter of a famous King of Israel, King Ahab. Ahab was one of the worst kings in the Bible and one of the reasons was his wife. He married a Phoenician princess by the name of Jezebel. I'm willing to bet that just about everyone has heard of Jezebel. Twenty-eight hundred years after her death, her name lives on. A Jezebel is a cruel, mean woman who stops at nothing to get her way. This is the very type of woman Jezebel was. If she wanted something, she got it, even if she had to kill for it. She worshipped the Canaanite god Baal, murdered many of Israel's prophet, and made Elijah and Yahweh into a laughingstock. She was a bad, bad woman.

Jezebel wasn't a queen but she was a mother. What sort of mother do you think she was? Bad. What kind of child do you think she'd have? Bad.

Athaliah is the worst mother in the Bible and her story speaks to this truth. Whether you like it or not, we become our parents. It is one of the reasons that Mother's Day is so tricky. Some come praying, "Please God, help me be exactly like my mother." Others pray, "Please God, don't let me turn into my mother."

Parental influence is strong. We cannot avoid it. If we are honest, there are both wanted and unwanted qualities that every parent bestows upon their children. Recognizing what you inherited might be the very reason for you to celebrate today. It might also be a reason for you to work to change and become a different person, moving past unwanted qualities. Athaliah needed to do that work and didn't and the result was, she became the worst mother in the Bible. It happened this way.

At a young age, Athaliah hand was given in marriage to Jehoram, the crown prince of Judah, the southern kingdom. It was probably an attempt to bring the kingdoms back together even though it didn't work out that way. Jehoram and Athaliah have a son name Ahaziah and a daughter named, Jehosheba. When these two children are teenagers, their father is becomes king. During this time, both Ahaziah and Jehosheba marry. Ahaziah has a number of children, who along with him, are heirs to the throne. Jehosheba didn't have or couldn't have children.

At the end of eight years, Jehoram died and his son Ahaziah became king. Now if you are following this story and the new information you have about "gevurah", who becomes the queen mother? Athaliah. She is the queen mother for only one year because unfortunately, her son dies in battle. A normal mother would grieve but she's not a normal mother. Instead of grieving, she earns the honor of being the worst mother in the bible because "... when Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, saw that her son was dead, she set about to destroy all the royal family." (1 Kings 11:1) Athaliah kills her own grandchildren so she can reign as queen. Athaliah didn't move past her mother bad qualities. Rather she embraced them, expanded on them and became worse than her mother Jezebel. She uses her position as the Queen Mother to usurp the throne upon her son's death.³ She becomes the only woman to rule over Israel or Judah because she kills all of the heirs to the throne, or at least she thought she did.

Wow, Randy, could you have found a more depressing story for Mother's Day? Probably not but at the very least, for those of you who aren't sure you did or are doing a very good job as a mother, you can say, "At least I'm not Athaliah." Let's take a break from her story and to take a quick look at another queen mother, the best mother in the Bible. Does anyone want to venture a guess who she is? Mary. Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Mary was the best queen mother. The early church fathers actually saw Mary as a Queen Mother straight out of the Old Testament tradition of "gevurah." She was supernaturally appointed to the role of being the mother of the King. The church fathers pointed to that moment when Elizabeth greets Mary and says, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the "queen mother", as the mother of the Lord.

At the wedding of Cana, she plays the role of the queen mother, encouraging her son to act on behalf of her people. The liturgy of the church repeated expressions about her sacrifice, her piety, her obedience as queen. Early art depicts Mary wearing a crown.⁴ You can see that today with contemporary tracts and pamphlets used in Roman Catholic tradition. She was, undoubtedly, the best mother that ever lived. She mentored and loved and shaped the Son of God as the Best Queen Mother.

As the best mother in the Bible, we have precious few stories about Mary as a mother, with only one about the childhood of Jesus. It is the Passover. Mary, Joseph, Jesus along with his brothers and sisters and other people from Nazareth travel in a large caravan to Jerusalem for the week-long celebration. Once the Passover is over, the family and neighbors start walking back to Nazareth, a trip that would take about 8 days. They get one day out from Jerusalem and a conversation something like this takes place. "Joe, do you know where Jesus is? No, Mary, I thought he was with you." And then there was this blood-curdling scream. Mary, the best mother in the Bible, the best queen mother, Mary has misplaced the Son of God.

They walked back to Jerusalem which took a full day and then, it took another day for them to find Jesus. One day out, one day back, one day to find Jesus. How many of you ever misplaced a child? Just about every parent has a story of losing Johnny or Susie in the mall, or grocery store or amusement park. It is a terrible feeling. How many have lost a child for three days? The best mom in the Bible, the best Queen Mom did in history, lost the king.

The whole point of this is there are no perfect Moms, no perfect mothers. If you measure yourself against perfection, you are always going to come up short. All of us, our grandmothers, our mothers, and our kids when they become mothers are all going to fall short. We are going to make mistakes. No perfect moms, no perfect grandmas. We all fall short and because of this, mother's day needs to include forgiveness.

Mother's Day needs three types of forgiveness, the forgiveness that you might extend to your mom, the forgiveness that she needs to give to you and the forgiveness that you need to give to yourself. All of that was there in the story of Jesus at the Temple. Mary needed to forgive herself for losing her son, forgive Jesus for wandering off, and Jesus needed to forgive his mother for leaving him behind. Forgiving a mother, forgiving a child, forgiving your self are important, all are important.

If Mother's Day is about love and it is, and forgiveness is about love, and it is, then we will really love and honor our mothers if we forgive. As wonderful as your mother was or is, there are things that need to be forgiven. Every mother, even the best mother in the Bible, needs this. And no matter how wonderful we have been, as our mother's daughters and sons, we need to seek their forgiveness as well. And yes, that is still possible even if they are no longer with us. Maybe, most important of all, we need to forgive ourselves, for where we failed our mothers or failed as a mother. Sometimes, forgiveness is easy to give; other times, it takes a lot of work and many years, requiring the help of a counselor or minister. But it may be the very gift that you need to offer in order to become who God wants you to be, to overcome whatever flaws or imperfections that you experienced growing up.

That truth takes us back to that awful story about the worst queen mother in the Bible, Athaliah. Remember where we left off? Athaliah. She makes herself queen because she kills all of the heirs to the throne, or at least she thought she did. But Athaliah was such a bad mother than she clearly didn't know all of her grandchildren because she missed one, a one-year-old grandson by the name of Jehoash. And here is the amazing thing. Her daughter, Jehosheba "...stole him away from among the king's children who were about to be killed; she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus she hid him from Athaliah so that he was not killed; he remained with her six years, hidden in the house of the Lord, while Athaliah reigned over the land." (1 Kings 11:2-3) Athaliah's sister intervened, Aunt Jehosheba rescued her nephew, the rightful heir to the throne.

Let's think about this for a moment. Who was Jehosheba's mother? Athaliah. Who was Jehosheba's grandmother? Jezebel. So why wasn't Jehosheba like them? The only answer is she was grounded in faith. Jehosheba was married to a priest Jehoiada and sought the refuge of the house of the Lord to hide Jehoash. Through faith and forgiveness, Jehosheba becomes living proof that you don't have to become your mother. You don't have to become your father. You don't have to be your grandmother or your grandfather. You can break the family tree of dysfunction. Jehosheba did just that.

Jehosheba was a loving aunt nurturing her nephew. After six years, little Jehoash, now seven, is evidently ready to be king. Aunt Jehosheba and his uncle Jehoiada take him out of hiding. They gathered all of the priests and Levites for a coronation. They put a crown on his head, give him a copy of the Ten Commandments, and anointed him with oil. Queen Athaliah cries out, "Treason!" but no one is listening. Her evil reign is over. She is put to death. Jehoash is now king and this is important. He reigned for 40 years as one of the greatest kings of Judah because scripture tells us that "Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all his days." (2 Kings 12:2) How did that happen? Jehosheba. She wasn't a queen mother but she nevertheless served an incredible role as an aunt.

The footnote to this terrible Mother's Day story is an important reminder that even as we celebrate our mothers on this day, there are likely others whom we should honor and recognize for their nurturing roles. There are women who, though not our mother, were there for us when we needed them and we will be forever indebted to them. It may have been an aunt or a grandmother, or a teacher or counselor or neighbor. Somebody saw you and noticed you and cared. They may not have been a queen mother but you should crown them with honor for the influence that had on your life.

I started off this talking about the complexity of Mother's Day and I hope you see just about all of the complexities that we experience are in the Bible. Fortunately, not one of us had a mother as bad as Athaliah. But we also didn't have one as perfect as Mary. She was somewhere in between just as you are somewhere in between. But on this day, we offer honor and praise, recognizing their influence on our lives and crowning them with love, through the gift of grace and forgiveness.

For all of the mothers and women of nurture, thank you. May God bless you on this day with recognition fit for a Queen.

¹ Hamilton, Adam. The Bible's Worst Mom. May 10, 2015. The form and some of the content is inspired by this sermon is inspired by this sermon.

² Berlyn, P. J. (1996). The Great Ladies. *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 24(1), 26-35.

³ Bowen, N. R. (2001). The quest for the historical gēbîrâ. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 63(4), 597-618.

⁴ Stephen, M. (1955). Mary queen. *Worship*, 29(6), 312-316.