

## Title: MOTHER'S DAY

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At the Los Angeles University Cathedral

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## MOTHER'S DAY

I have not been as faithful in the Cathedral as I was in other places to preach the messages that I preach every year. This year I've been returning to that pattern. And it's Mother's Day, so I return to the annual message that I have in booklet form. The title is *God Couldn't be Everywhere? ... So He Made Mothers!* I think there is one on that lectern over there if a camera wants to pick it up somewhere.

"God couldn't be everywhere, so He made mothers!" It's an old Jewish proverb. I put a question mark behind it on the title because we know, when we think about it, that God can be everywhere. That's the doctrine of omnipresence. And I see that somebody who reprinted it decided to change my question mark to an exclamation mark so that's okay, but it's a beautiful and wonderful thought. "God couldn't be everywhere, so He made mothers," and perhaps an exclamation mark is proper because God can be everywhere by working through mothers with His Spirit. In this book I have some statements about mothers. I'm going to read them again—probably going to be new to a lot of you that have come to the family of King's Houses since I last preached this.

"On the judgment day, the Recording Angel  
will forgive much to him  
who can say, 'I never knew my mother.'"

—Charles Lamb

"All that I am my Mother made me."

—John Quincy Adams

"The bravest battle that was ever fought;  
Shall I tell you what and when?  
On the maps of the world you will not find it,  
it was fought by the mothers of men."

—Juaquin Miller

"A mother is a Mother still  
the holiest thing alive."

—Coleridge

"Men are what their Mothers make them."

—Emerson

“To the soldier who falls on the battlefield,  
    we give bronze and tablet.  
But to a Mother, it is a battle  
    without glory.  
She wears no medals of a nation.  
Her badge is the furrowed lines  
    upon her face.”

—Unknown

“Years to a mother bring distress,  
    but do not make her love any less.”

—Woodsworth

“Blessing she is, God made her so,  
    And deeds of weekly holiness  
    Fall from her noiseless as the snow.”

—Lowell

Some on Mother’s Day wear the color of a flower signifying that their mother is gone. Another who faced that experience, and remembered mother, wrote these lines:

“She always leaned to watch for us,  
    Anxious if we were late,  
    In winter by the window,  
    In summer by the gate.  
Her thoughts were all so full of us—  
    She never could forget!  
    And so I think that where she is,  
    She must be watching yet.  
Waiting till we come home to her,  
    Anxious if we are late—  
Watching from heaven’s window,  
    Leaning from heaven’s gate.”

—Margaret Widdemer

And I’ve already said it, the Jewish people have a saying out of their proverbs: “God couldn’t be everywhere, so He made mothers.” But if you take it one step further, God who is everything can be a mother.

Genesis 17:1: “The Lord appeared unto Abraham, said unto him, I am the Almighty God.” *El Shaddai*: it comes from shad which means ‘breast.’ Thus *El Shaddai* is ‘the breasted one’ and it comes in that meaning of a mother nursing her helpless child on her breast so it signifies the giver of strength, the nourisher. It is one of the few pictures in Scripture where God compares Himself to the role of a mother when He says, “I’m *El Shaddai*.” Ethel Clemance will remember her father Dr. Price used to translate that name with a transliteration saying it means ‘The enough God.’ The God who is enough. Whatever your need, He is enough. Certainly the mother who holds and protects that child on her breast and provides all that is needed for that child’s strength and nourishment portrays that view of God, but God’s more direct in Isaiah 66. There He says in the *King James Version*, “As one whom his mother comforteth,” (Isaiah 66:13), “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.”

Now today's message has to reach where you are. This is not a message where we're going to open the Scripture to truths of prophecy that give us an understanding of God's hand on history. It is not some theological discussion past the point we've already taken in, that twice in Scripture—at least in these two places, God lets our concept or perception of the role of a mother on earth be caught up in the revelation that He is giving to us of what He will be to His people; and, “As a mother comforting, so will I comfort you,” God lets Himself be identified with whatever we can perceive of a mother's role on earth.

Now Jesus used the father symbol when He talked of “our heavenly Father”, He draws a comparison and says, if you go to an earthly father and ask him for bread, he will not give you a stone; and if you go to an earthly father and ask him for fish, he will not give you a serpent. So likewise, He then makes the leap—our heavenly Father loves to do good things for you. If Jesus, pointing to what we all know—the love of an earthly father—could then elevate it and say whatever you can perceive in that earthly expression, our heavenly Father is so much more..., that's my license today and in this book to look at earthly mothers in their comforting or loving expression because this day gives us that good focus and memory on what mothers are and what they mean and what they do.

I can look at a mother who is earthly in Scripture. See her love, and say on the basis, “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you” how much more today and any other day, we can count on our heavenly Mother, which *El Shaddai* gives us license to say, “If we see love in an earthly mother, how much more shall our heavenly Mother comfort.” Too bad all the feminists aren't here today. You go tell them about it. They'll never believe I preached this message.

And I look at three Biblical mothers:

Jochebed. You have to go a little forward to Exodus 6 to find the name of the mother of Moses. And she will give us a view specifically focused in a particular situation, a view of a mother's love that when seen I can say, “How much more our heavenly Father.” You all know the story. The some 400 years was approaching when God had promised Abraham that his people who would be carried..., his descendants, that is, who would be carried into bondage and fall into slavery; and would be delivered and come back to the place of promise given to Abraham. The Pharaoh knew about those prophecies. He knew the time was upon him and he proceeded to eliminate all the male children born among the slaves in order to eliminate the possibility of a deliverer growing up—all of the male children were thrown to the crocodiles in the river Nile.

Jochebed—the first name in Scripture linked with Jehovah. It's a cognate, or rather a composite word that links her name with Jehovah. Literally it means “the glory of Jehovah.” She's pregnant and as the child develops within her, living in a slave hut made of mud and reeds, fear must have grown accordingly—“Will it be a boy or will it be a girl?” ...in the knowledge that if it's a boy, it will be seized immediately and thrown into the river—killed. Sure enough, when the baby is born it's a boy.

Now I want Jochebed to portray the love of a mother to the hopeless and to the helpless, those that are caught into a circumstance—in this case, not of Moses' choosing; ...those who are caught in a circumstance that is beyond your power to cope with, a helplessness and a hopelessness that surrounds, and it communicates only one thing: your destruction, your annihilation, your end. I see this mother Jochebed with this baby whose every cry brought the threat of descending soldiers. See this mother who was a slave with no rights of any kind. For three solid months she managed to hide him—somehow suppress or prevent his cries from being heard three solid months.

There are mothers here today who know the stress of those first three months. Every hour, every day: “Will he be discovered?” And he can do nothing; Moses can do nothing.

She contrives a way. Somehow or other she manages to bring reeds and mud from the riverbank and make a little basket. Somehow or other she manages to find out where the princess goes everyday to bathe. I'm sure that is not something that was common knowledge among the slaves. Somehow she manages to slip through the streets of that slave city in Memphis carrying this baby, knowing that at any moment if discovered, we've already said he'll be slain. Somehow she manages to place him in the little basket made of reeds in exactly the spot where he would float into the vision frame of the princess of Egypt.

And somehow or other she manages to get her daughter Miriam hidden sufficiently that when the princess discovers Moses.... And sure enough, because he was a..., as the Scripture says, a "comely child", the princess wants to keep him; and the timing of Miriam suddenly slipping forward—because the princess recognized a Hebrew child, and saying, "Would you like a Hebrew mother to nurse the child?" And sure enough—you know the rest of the story—he is raised a prince in the house of Pharaoh, and, by his own choice will lead them out as their deliverer.

Now each of these mothers is going to focus this message in a way not everybody is going to find it to fit. This part of the message is to those—and I'm quite sure they are probably in the minority in this congregation, those that are under some stress of circumstance that leaves you helpless and hopeless. And there certainly are some who will be listening by television. The message is axiomatic; this earthly mother symbolizes what every mother knows about the never-dying love of a mother: She will not give up to those circumstances; she will not accept the inevitable; she will find a way, no matter what it takes, to deliver this helpless child from circumstances that show no way out. But she found a way out with her meager resources, slave maiden though she was. She found with a never-dying, never-give-up love for the helpless, she found a way.

Make the jump: our heavenly Mother—to use that phrase without apology or another explanation, our heavenly Mother, unlike Jochebed, is also the Lord of hosts. He has no limits on His ability. He has all creation at His disposal.

All Jochebed tells me is that in that heart of God that made Him reveal Himself in Isaiah 66, "As a mother comforteth, so will I comfort," ...in that heart of God is that same love, "If a earthly mother will never give up and never say die and never stop looking until she finds a way to deliver the helpless, how much more will our heavenly Father deliver you?" That's the basis of the verse of Scripture that says, "He will not tempt you beyond what you are able." That's the basis for the verse of Scripture that says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And we'll see them both again. That is God our heavenly Mother in His love for the helpless. You may be helpless; our heavenly Mother is an all-powerful Helper. He will not give up. He will not leave you without help.

Second mother. I want to see her in a different light because she's been so glorified, exaggerated, and made divine that the earthly-mother side of her, which is the true side, is missed. John 19, verse 25: Mary—the most popular name in the world. Last time I did the research was a long time ago—1957: there were 3,720,000 women named Mary in this country. No matter where you go, she's revered around the world.

In this book, I talk about a trip to Tahiti—a little rundown church on a northern island. Centerpiece: Mary. Top and the edge of that plateau-shelf is La Paz, Bolivia—the only place in the world where planes fly up to land, highest airport in the world. As you leave the airport and see the towering Andes in the distance, you suddenly drop over an escarpment and the road winds down to La Paz that sits down in the valley under the escarpment. Coming up that rugged road we had to stop and park. The procession was carrying the image of Mary with the darts piercing her heart, reminiscent of the sayings of Simeon; and she had been elevated to divine stature by the Catholics.

They have exaggerated the role of the mother, as though she must express that mother view in appealing to Christ, because they have forgotten that God didn't need Mary to be a mother. He had that quality in Himself.

I want to look at Mary, not as divine but as human. I want to look at her as the New Testament reveals her: one who did not understand her Son; one who simply viewed, in spite of the prophecy that was given, viewed Him through fleshly eyes all too often. I want to view her from inside her own human feelings of rejection, not understanding her Son at all, seeing her own fears realized as He hung bleeding and dying on that cross. And yet John 19:25 says, "There stood by his cross his mother... there stood by his cross... there stood by his cross his mother"—and she will symbolize love for the rejected.

As Moses in this message is seen in his earliest position helpless—those that feel helpless can identify; Jesus in this particular frame at this particular moment, seen from the earthly-mother side (rather than the divine-with-prophetic-understanding side), was rejected, to quote Isaiah, by all men: "He came to his own and they received him not."

She had watched Him led through the streets, screamed at, spat on, bearing His cross. She stood and watched her Son that she had held as a baby in her arms. And in spite of all that He might teach, she just couldn't seem to rise to the level of understanding that He really was not hers; that she had been honored above all women to bear the Incarnate Son of God. To her, He was her child. You can feel her frustration when He was 12 years old, missing Him, leaving Jerusalem, crying it out, "My father and I were looking for you—your father and I." He rebukes her even then with I'm sure a mysterious statement to her: "I must be about my Father's business," meaning His heavenly Father.

Shortly before writing this book, I had sat on a moonlit night on top of Mount Tabor in Israel for about an hour looking across at the lights of Nazareth and the little rising hill that marks its landmark, and reflected on the events at Nazareth when He began to preach. And His family—sensing the resentment of the citizens of the town by the claims that Jesus was making about Himself and hearing them say with a sneer, "Isn't this the carpenter's son?"—...came to rescue Him from what they knew was a fermenting mob riot that sought to lay hands on Him to stop Him from saying some of the things He was saying about Himself. To be coldly rebuked as Jesus looked at them when they said, "Your, your mother and brethren seek you," and He said, "Who is my mother? Who is my brother? These that do the will of the Father that sent me. These are my family."

Still not understanding in this passage, I repeat, seeing Him bleeding, dying and rejected of all men, she was not fainting, she wasn't fleeing, and she wasn't falling. She stood by His cross as life ebbed away. Love for the rejected.

I'm quite sure there has never been anybody on the face of this earth as rejected for unjust reasons as Jesus of Nazareth. And I do not bring the cross in front of us with its theological meaning; I bring it in front of us with His mother's limited understanding, from the earthly frame. To her, her Son hung there between two thieves—the object of revulsion, the object of hate, the object of rejection. She didn't reject Him. Her love did not waver. She stood—I'm sure every mother knows feeling the pain—only second to Jesus Himself or the heavenly Father Himself who saw His Son treated that way. She certainly stood third in line, but she stood there. She wouldn't reject Him though the whole world rejected Him.

As Jochebed can give you the comfort—"As a mother comforteth, so will I comfort"—as Jochebed can comfort you that no matter how hopeless your circumstance or mine, our heavenly Mother will find a way and we can rest in His arms in that figure. If you're one of those listening by television, radio, or here today that has felt rejection from everybody, our heavenly Mother stands by and will not reject. "Him that cometh unto me"; make sense of that verse, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast

out.” That’s our heavenly Mother—no worry that He will take us and treat us as the rest of the world. Love to the rejected.

I go to II Samuel 21 for the picture of the third mother. Her name: Rizpah.

II Samuel 21. She was just a girlfriend of Saul, not even his wife—a concubine, but she bore him two sons. Saul the Benjamite was the first king anointed by Samuel over Israel. In his beginnings God gave him a new heart and he was a great king, but as his power grew he became transformed until he ends his life in suicide and his body nailed to a wall near Mount Gilboa by the enemies; writing his own epitaph before he died saying, “I have played the fool.”

Among the other foolish things that he did was to breach a sacred vow made by Joshua in the early days when the Israelites came into the Promised Land and Joshua made a vow with the Gibeonites that Israel would never destroy them with the sword. Saul, in arrogance, broke that vow. He slew the Gibeonites; set out to exterminate them, killing them with a sword.

After Saul committed suicide and David was anointed king, the Gibeonites came at the urging of David because God punished the Israelites for Saul’s action by putting a great famine on the land. Famine struck the land. And in crying out to God for the cause..., David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord said it’s because Saul broke the vow. He therefore urged the Gibeonites that remained to come and ask on their arrival what he could do to make atonement for what Saul had done, putting their whole nation to sword.

It was a cruel day and in the frame of that cruel day, a brutal frame of reference, they said they wanted the seven sons of Saul—which included the two born of the concubine Rizpah. They wanted those seven sons and they would hang them on a hill in Gibeah. David gave them the sons, and they hanged the seven sons on a hill in Gibeah. And at the time they were hanged, the Bible says it was the month of the barley harvest which is April. From April until the rains came in October, those sons were going to hang on that hill. The Gibeonites intended them to hang forever.

Now, the mother of these two sons, Rizpah, upon learning where the sons were hanging, including her two, she goes to that hill at the time, as I said, of the barley harvest which is April, bringing sackcloth either for mourning or to sit upon or to make a small tent. And night and day from the barley harvest until the coming of the rains in October the Bible says she stayed on that hill. She fought off birds by day; animals by night. April..., May..., June..., July..., August..., September..., October... seven months. Seven long months she sat on that hill. Day; night. Fighting off the birds, I repeat, by day and the animals by night.

Now at the risk of being revolting, let me force with word picture the mind to hone in on those seven bodies hanging there. The flesh would begin to rot and droop from the frame, the sun would blacken, and inch by inch as the months went by, they would begin to.... (The stench would be overwhelming.) To remain on that hill at the foot of those seven crosses would be to live in constant nausea and constant exposure to the change from the recognizable to the revolting and the horrible, as the flesh inch by inch would begin to sag from the bones; and the body would rot and pieces; and parts would begin to fall to the ground. By words, I’m trying to force us to see a thing become revolting.

When she started—you can feel the emotion and the tug, those are her sons and they’re dead on that tree, but as she wearily fought off the birds and fought off the animals, they would turn to a thing that was revolting, as I’ve said. It didn’t affect Rizpah. She stayed there night..., morning..., noon..., night. At risk of life, she fought off the birds; she fought off the animals.

Eventually David—that great heart that God described as “a man after his own heart”—eventually he heard the news. Horrified himself, he sent the word to take what remained of their bodies down; join them with the bones of Jonathan and Saul; and give them a place of honorable burial, and brought back Rizpah an honor that was due her from that terrible hill.

If Jochebed portrays God’s never-say-die, never-give-up, never-turn-loose, never stop until you find a way to deliver the helpless; and Mary signifies that mother’s trait that when all else reject her Son, she stood by; Rizpah portrays that unbelievable aspect of the enduring love of a mother who will watch her sons turn to decay and become things of revulsion, but her love will not depart.

If these earthly mothers show that kind of love, how much more on this day when we remember mothers, can we look past our circumstance of helplessness, rejection, or downright despicability, and say we thank God that “As a mother comforteth, so will I comfort”? Whatever your circumstance today, I’m glad this church exists to preach the love of God instead of some of the baloney that goes on that so clouds that side of God’s nature.

He is God and He changes not. He is *El Shaddai*, the Mother who comforts. He is your God and will never leave you nor forsake you. Take heart in your circumstance: “As a mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.”

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