



MOTHER'S DAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. The History Section

Some scholars believe the mother of Mother's Day observance can be traced to a festival honoring "Mother of Gods" that was observed through Greece into Rome about 250 years before Christ. With the birth and spread of the Christian church, that festival was invested with a new spirit and transformed so that it became a celebration of the "Mother Church," and the faithful would bring gifts to the church on MidLent Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent. Eventually, this practice evolved into "Mothering Sunday," when young male and female servants and apprentices were allowed to visit their parents, bearing gifts in particular for their mothers.¹

It was hundreds of years before an official observance of Mother's Day reached the United States. The second Sunday in May was declared a national holiday honoring mothers by President Woodrow Wilson in 1915.²

II. Songs That Speak to the Moment

Faith of Our Mothers

Faith of our mothers, living still
In cradle song and bedtime prayer;
In nursery lore and fireside love,
Thy presence still pervades the air:
Faith of our mothers, living faith!
We will be true to thee to death.

Faith of our mothers, loving faith,
Fount of our childhood's trust and grace,
Oh, may thy consecration prove
Source of a finer, nobler race:
Faith of our mothers, living faith,
We will be true to thee till death.

Faith of our mothers, guiding faith,
For youthful longing, youthful doubt,
How blurred our vision, blind our way,
Thy providential care without:
Faith of our mothers, guiding faith,
We will be true to thee till death.

Faith of our mothers, Christian faith,
Is truth beyond our stumbling creeds,
Still serve the home and save the Church,
And breathe thy spirit through our deeds:
Faith of our mothers, Christian faith!
We will be true to thee till death.³

Will the Circle Be Unbroken

CHORUS: Can the circle be unbroken,
By and by, Lord, bye and bye?
There's a better home a-waiting
In the sky, Lord, in the sky.

I was standing by the window
On one cold and cloudy day;

And I saw the hearse come rolling
For to carry my mother away.

Lord, I told the undertaker,
“Undertaker, please drive slow,
For this body you are hauling,
Lord, I hate to see her go.”

I followed close behind her,
Tried to hold up and be brave,
But I could not hide my sorrow
When they laid her in the grave.

Went back home, Lord. My home was lonesome
Since my mother, she was gone,
All my brothers, sisters crying.
What a home so sad and lone!

Now my mother, she’s crossed over
Where so many have gone before;
And I know, Lord, I will meet her
Just waiting at glory’s door.⁴

Every Day Is Like Mother’s Day

Every day feels like Mother’s Day
She is with me in my heart
I can often hear...hear my mother’s voice
We will never ever be apart
(repeat)

Verse

I never can forget on Christmas morning
When my family would all gather around our house
Mama would sit over there in her big old rocking chair
She would speak so softly and so kind yeah yeah yes
Lord I thank you I thank you for all my children
Every one of them yes you gave each one of them to me
So I try to be a very good mother
I even forgot...I forgot all about my needs

Every day feels like Mother’s Day
She is with me in my heart
I can often hear...hear my mother’s voice
We will never ever be apart

She gave me my start (gave me my start)
I'm gonna keep her in my heart (here to my heart)
My love for my mother (it will never depart)
Mama showed me the right way (showed me the way)
By the path that she laid (by the path she laid)
I think about my mother (every day)
Mama gave me her love (gave me her love)
Then when she went on to glory on the wings (wings of a dove)
Now she's looking down on me (from up above)
She's looking down on me

Every day feels like Mother's Day
She is with me in my heart
I can often hear...hear my mother's voice
We will never ever be apart.⁵

III. Autobiographical Story/Personal Testimony

I was reared by a first-born-of-six, exceedingly intelligent, at times unflinchingly frank, and most always defiantly independent Black woman. Even after she surrendered to her call to ministry and then took on the mantle of preaching and pastoring, the Rev. Joyce C. Mallory was never fully delivered from her inability to receive unsolicited advice, counsel, and commands. Many of us know our mothers to have some special facial expressions that signal when their "*Don't go there!*" attitudes are dangerously rising. My mother's fiercest looks were reserved for those who tried to tell her what she should do and what she should think; she just didn't play that.

Over the years, I have learned that—dirty looks aside—my mother was actually on to something. It's not a bad idea for a sistah to think for herself, even when it comes to matters of religion, theology, and the Bible. "The Bible itself is a patriarchal text," explains the Rev. A. Nevell Owens, who teaches in the religion department at Florida A&M University. "It was primarily written by men, interpreted by men, primarily white men in this country, and that interpretation depreciates women in general and black women specifically."

"Because of Black women's experience living in a patriarchal and sexist society," Owens adds, when it comes to biblical interpretation "...they need to have their own voice and maintain their own perspective on what it's like living life as a Black woman in America."

In fact, many a devout churchwoman made her mark on the historical continuum of the uplift, liberation, and fight toward human dignity and full personhood of Black folk—Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Jarena Lee, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida B. Wells, etc., etc.—because she refused to be dictated to, told how to act or think, especially when folk used the Bible to justify keeping our community enslaved, oppressed, or otherwise shackled.

In the world of academia, such independence has given rise to “womanist” theology, a relatively new development in liberation theology that emerged in the halls of education during the 1980s and 1990s. But as evidenced by my mother’s reaction and that of many a strong Black woman, womanist theology predates its emergence in the halls of the academy.

The term itself, “womanist,” was coined by poet/novelist/feminist/Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker, who plucked it from an old Black folk expression, “You acting womanish.” Here is her definition, in part, as recorded in her book In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose:

1. From womanish (Opposite of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another Black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious.⁶

It wasn’t until I was in graduate school that I learned of the term “womanist,” but what I quickly realized was that I had been raised by one and raised to be one! Now, in my own ministry, I encourage sistahs to look at the Bible unapologetically from the vantage point of their experiences as Black women and the testimonies of other Black women they know. I have learned that reading sacred texts and taking in the valuable witness of my foremothers means sharing in the realities and faith experiences of women like me. That’s important because there is no one-size-fits-all engagement with the Bible.

Interpreting the divine is personal—just as personal as your particular Sunday morning shout, or the way the tears fall when your heart is overflowing with unspeakable joy, or the dance of ecstatic praise that takes over when you least expect it, or even the run that hits your feet even when no one is chasing you. Let someone dictate how I should worship and praise? Not hardly. Take as gospel what someone else says they think I should do and what they think I should think when it comes to Scripture? *“Don’t go there!”*⁷

I write in journal form many of my prayers to and conversations with the LORD. I started prayer journaling in 1995 at the suggestion of my mother. A devoted prayer-journal keeper herself, my mother was convinced that journaling would help us “recognize through faith our need to depend and act on God’s promises, not God’s ‘Yes’ answers to our prayers.” I would later come to not only desire the conviction but also the motivation for journaling that Rev. Dr. Renita Weems once shared with Rev. Dr. Jessica Ingram: “Write ‘til it hurts, and then write ‘til it heals.”

In this installment, I acknowledge some 10 years later the still-lingering pain of my mother's absence, even while I celebrate the rich and ongoing blessings of our LORD. Once again, I found God's grace sufficient, God's love steadfast and eternal.

8.8.06
12:18 p.m.
Abba Daddy God:

As I cry, I have tried in the shower just now to rationalize, philosophize, theologize away my feelings, but I have to be real, record the truth: I feel lonely in this pregnancy without my mother.

God forgive me. I wracked my brain trying to think of who might understand and relate. At the moment, I can't think of anyone I know who's had a baby after her mother had passed. Well, only [my mother-in-law] Ann White, whom I just thought of.

I called [my best girlfriend], and I think I've been calling her in hopes of her filling the void. I can't seem to reach her, though.

I don't want to be ungrateful in any way, LORD. I am so happy and awed You have blessed me this way.

And—

I deeply miss my mother

This is a new grief, an unanticipated assault.

Help me. Comfort me. Show me the way in and through this, I pray. I trust and know and believe You will. I don't believe my feelings belie my trust in, belief in, and knowledge of You. I anticipate Your comforting and ministering Spirit, O God, because You said You would not leave me comfortless.

And, I love You.

And, it's obvious, eternal and true: You love me.

Thank You, LORD. Thank You.

I pray in the midst of grief in tears, relying on and calling upon the Sweet Name of Jesus Christ, my Savior.

Amen.

Postscript: The Word of God is true: "God puts the lonely in families," Ps. 68:6. Later that day, as the LORD would have it, I received encouragement, support, and love from my husband, mother-in-law, and a member of my church family, each of whom God used as blessed comfort to me through this moment of unexpected sorrow.

IV. Poetry and Other Voices

We as women have so much to offer
But our giving begins with our families
The center where God resides

If we fail here
How can we move into the world?
Women have a special responsibility
When our children talk to us—listen
When our husbands need encouragement—offer a warm embrace
When our sisters and brothers need a kind word—offer it
When our parents need love and patience—provide it⁸

When You Are a Mother

When you are a mother
the world doesn't stop just because you get the flu
it just goes faster.
When you are a mother
sleep is a privilege
not a right.
When you are a mother
Yo Gabba Gabba and Wonder Pets are your favorite shows
not The Young and the Restless.
When you are a mother
you gave up the right to just be you.
When you are a mother
everything seems so much harder than they were
when you were single.
Well they are.
Being a mother is the hardest, most important role one could ever take on.
Too bad we don't get trophies when they have reached 18.
Instead we get licensed in psychology.⁹

Quotes¹⁰

“Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to ‘jump at de sun.’ We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground.”

—Zora Neale Hurston

“Yes, Mother. I can see you are flawed. You have not hidden it. That is your greatest gift to me.”

—Alice Walker

“Biology is the least of what makes someone a mother.”

—Oprah Winfrey

“Mama was my greatest teacher, a teacher of compassion, love and fearlessness. If love is sweet as a flower, then my mother is that sweet flower of love.”

—Stevie Wonder

“My doctors told me I would never walk again. My mother told me I would. I believed my mother.”

—Wilma Rudolph

“My mother never gave up on me. I messed up in school so much they were sending me home, but my mother sent me right back.”

—Denzel Washington

V. Other Resources

Call to Worship/Responsive Reading for Mother’s Day

Leader: All-knowing God, Who has called us to this place at such a time as this, we come from Bunche Park and the Bahamas, Jamaica and Jacksonville, Monticello and Miami Gardens—the many places too numerous to name, where our mothers raised us, nurtured us, and taught us Your Holy Name.

People: We celebrate our holy heritage, O God, and the homes of our youth, for as in one body, we have many members.

Leader: Divine Nurturer, Who shaped and developed us so that now we are teachers, preachers, cooks, caretakers, nurses, professors, pharmacists, students, administrators, stay-at-home mothers, doctors, lawyers—the realization of our mothers’ prayers and our grandmothers’ dreams.

People: We celebrate our holy heritage, O God, and the education and training for today and of our yesterdays, for as in one body, we have many members, and not all the members have the same function.

Leader: Jehovah-Jirah, Who blessed us with mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and “other mothers,” who bent their backs cleaning other folks’ homes, cooking other folks’ food, caring for other folks’ babies, teaching other folks’ children, picking cotton, pushing paper—all the while relying on You to make ways out of no way.

People: We celebrate our holy heritage, O God, and the Black women in our lives, who provided for and equipped us. We who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Leader: Sovereign God, the God of our weary years, the God of our silent tears, Thou Who has brought us thus far on the way, Thou Who has by Thy might, led us into the light. Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

All: As we celebrate and continue our holy heritage, O God, let our love be genuine, let us hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor

and always remember the loving legacy of the black women of strength, courage, faith, and love whom You sent as blessings before us.

Leader: Remembering Eve, the mother of us all, uniquely created in Your image,

People: We give You thanks, O God, for the foremothers of our faith.

Leader: Remembering Miriam, Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah, and Deborah, each uniquely dispatched in Your divine destiny,

People: We give You thanks, O God, for the foremothers of our faith.

Leader: Remembering Zipporah, Hagar, Rahab, and Huldah, each uniquely fortified by Your faithfulness and favor,

People: We give You thanks, O God, for the foremothers of our faith.

Leader: Remembering Mary, the virgin mother; the woman at the well; Mary Magdalene and the woman with the issue of blood, uniquely molded by Your manifold mercies,

People: We give You thanks, O God, for the foremothers of our faith.

Leader: Remembering Sarah Allen, Jarena Lee, Rosa Parks, Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, and every praying, prophesying, and preaching women down through the ages, each uniquely anointed by Your amazing grace,

People: We give You thanks, O God, for the foremothers of our faith, Your daughters of divine destiny, our heritage of holiness.¹¹

Bulletin Cover for Mother's Day

- <http://www.biography.com/womens-history/mothers-day.jsp>
- <http://www.deepershopping.com/church-supplies/mothers-day-church-bulletins.html>
- <http://www.bibleknowledgebookstore.com/church-supplies/mothers-day-church-bulletins.html>

Notes

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3. "Faith of Our Mothers," Hymnlyrics.org Hymn Center. http://www.hymnlyrics.org/lyrics/faith_of_our_mothers.html accessed 5 February 2011
4. The Staple Singers. "Will The Circle Stay Unbroken." <http://www.justsomesongs.com/1437406/The-Staple-Singers-Will-the-circle-be-unbroken-Lyrics> accessed 5 February 2011
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11. Call to Worship/Responsive Reading for Mother's Day by Maria Mallory White