



A True Mother's Day

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This Mother's Day brought with it a range of emotions. While Mother's Day is often a complicated holiday, this year it seemed even more so given the continued impact of COVID-19 and the suffering being experienced by so many around the globe and in our own communities. So often, our observances are out of touch with the lived reality of many who mother, such as those who grieve infertility or who experience strained relations. But this year, the disconnect between the historical legacy of Mother's Day as an intersectional call to action and anti-war movement and our current Hallmark-driven celebrations seems greater than ever.

The irony of celebrating mothers with cards and candy while we watch news of bombs falling on Ukrainian mothers and children, Afghan women and girls getting denied jobs or education, and our Supreme Court's intent to open again the culture war over women's bodies, highlights how little progress has been made. For the early founders of what we observe today as Mother's Day, our contemporary celebration would smack of superficiality, materialism, and indeed, patriarchy.

Ann Jarvis, considered the founder of Mother's Day, called for a "[Mothers Work Day](#)" in 1858 to address maternal and child health conditions that were afflicting her West Virginian town. During the Civil War, she organized a "Women's Friendship Day" to care for soldiers on both sides and ultimately seek an end to the war. Inspired by Jarvis's legacy, the prominent abolitionist and suffragist Julia Ward Howe called for a day in 1870 in which mothers would work for peace in accordance with a "Mother's Day Proclamation" that drew new attention to the effort:

Arise, then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts,
whether our baptism be that of water or of tears! . . . We women
of one country will be too tender of those of another country to
allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of
the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says "Disarm,
Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice." – Julia
Ward Howe

Like so many movements, the radical and fierce edge of Jarvis and Howe's vision was dulled as its popularity grew. In 1914, Congress passed a law declaring the second Sunday of May as Mother's Day, and the next year President Woodrow Wilson described it as a day for "public expression of our love and reverence for all mothers." You're welcome, Hallmark.

Throughout history, men have controlled the fate of women, of children, of soldiers and weapons, and even the Earth itself. For the future of our world, for the possibility of peace, this must change. We must renew the vision of Jarvis and Howe and link arms with our contemporary leaders like Yvonne Delk, Bernice Powell Jackson, Linda Jaramillo, Traci Blackmon, and others—all voices for peace with justice in our church and in our world.

Let us indeed celebrate Mother's Day every day, but not with more candy and cards. Rather, let us honor those who mother, and all who identify as women, by joining them in the struggle at the front lines of movements for Just Peace, for bodily autonomy, for equality in the workplace, for the livelihood of all God's children, and for the sustainability of the Earth itself.

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