

## Jehosheba – Sermon on 2 Kings 11

We are in old Israel with our text today.

200 years or so after the great kings David and Solomon.

The once striving kingdom had been separated into North and South.

One king was more wicked than the other.

Injustice, war and violence were on the agenda.

And what perhaps weighed even harder: people, and especially their leaders, had lost their faith in the living God.

Revolution here... protest there... crises, decay, and constantly changing inner and outer enemies.

Threats and lies, mistrust, greed and murder...

And in all that, we meet a woman with a breath-taking story of murder and mystery.

She was a princess in Judah during the time of the Divided Kingdom, a devoted aunt to her brother's children, and the wife of the high priest in Jerusalem.

Jehosheba...

She grew up in a household full of selfishness and evil. Her stepmother, Athalia was the daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, fierce enemies of Elijah, the prophet, if you remember.

Queen Athalia and the king had several children. One son of them was Ahazia.

The king however had several wives, and therefore more children, one of whom was Jehosheba.

The kingly court was a mess of intrigue and injustice.

For the ordinary people in Israel this was one of the darkest times ever. Not a good time to live...

Jehosheba stands out as the heroic daughter of a ruthless king.

Ahazia, Jehosheba's brother, only rules one year and then gets killed in battle.

He leaves several children.

After his death, his mother Athalia, sees the chance to grab the throne and rule the country.

She has all her grandchildren killed to save her position. No heir, no claim to the throne, she thinks.

But like all the best heroes, Jehosheba does what she can.

She takes the youngest child, a tiny baby boy, smuggles him out of the palace and hides with him in the temple, over which Athalia has no control. Church asylum, if you like...

Jehosheba saves one life. Probably all she could do.

Saving all the children would have been obvious fight and rebellion. But stealing the youngest one away, may well go unnoticed...

And here Shiphrah and Puah come to my mind, those brave midwives who opposed the Pharaoh, when he wants them to kill all the new born baby boys of the Israelite people. And Jochebeth comes to my mind – with smart young Miriam, who hid baby Moses in the reeds... And the Egyptian princess and her maids come to mind, as they take Moses into the Pharaoh's palace...

And last but not least, the kings of the Christmas story are to be remembered. After their visit in the stable with new born Jesus, they return home on a different road. They do not let Herod know where the new king had been born.

And Joseph, of course, mindful Joseph, who listens to the angel in his dream, and leads Mary and Jesus into exile in Egypt, and thus saves Jesus' life.

All these courageous role models stand up and step out to save innocent children's lives...

But back to Jehosheba.

We don't know the details of her saving deed.

We don't know how she managed to get Joash, the little boy, - whether she had his nurse to help her...

Jehosheba feared God.

And she knew that the safest place for her little nephew would be the house of God, the temple in which her husband was the high priest.

The Bible lets us assume that Athalia did not find out what happened. She supposed that the whole of her son's family had been killed.

Jehosheba does what she can. She gives up personal freedom and liberty to protect the baby in the bedrooms of the temple.

I wonder what fears may have gone through her mind. What worries?

What if Joash cried? What if Athalia's spies found out? What if the little boy grew up and wanted to move about?

What about the trustworthiness of the temple people?

Of her own husband, the priest?

Had they been caught, had the secret been found out, no doubt, Athalia would have been merciless.

For 6 years Jehosheba kept the child Joash in the temple, teaching him about the living God. And her husband, Jehoiada, the high priest, too, may have had a positive influence on the little prince.

When Joash turned 7, Jehoiada was able to organize a rebellion against Athalia and have her wiped out.

Young Joash was crowned the rightful king.

The high priest helped the young king reign. Instead of terror and uncertainty, the narrator reports that all the people rejoice, and that the city is quiet. Quiet after 200 years of war and violence.

“Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord, because the high priest instructed him,” we read in 2 Kings 12.

Jehosheba saved the life of Joash. By rescuing the little prince, she rescued the hope of Israel. She made sure that the royal line of King David could be continued, as promised, and centuries later Jesus would be born... a descendant of King David.

But to me today that is a side issue...

The real point to pay attention to, is Jehosheba's courage, her fearlessness and her humanity. With these attributes she may have influenced men and women around her, and her husband too.

They all surely wanted to end Athalia's cruel reign, but did not dare to stand up against her.

It took 7 years until Jehoiada and the resistance group around him saw the chance to end this dark episode in the history of Judah and initiate an overthrow.

Jehosheba teaches us to stand up for God, to be unafraid even when times are dangerous. To preserve our humanity and our faith in a loving God in the face of terror and evil. I would like to think that I would be like her. ...that I would stand up and step out for God's ways... that I would be brave in the face of hostility and cruel injustice...

Jehosheba could not save all her nieces and nephews. She could only sneak away with little Joash.

Let's stay with this image: we too, cannot save the whole world. We can only do what we do in the places where we live and work. We can be advocates, supporters, encouragers, even rescuers, influencers, enablers...

And by the end of the day, with lots of us doing the same, save the hope of the world.

Global transformation through thousands or millions of Jehoshebas?

...doing the right thing in countless places and situations?

Yes, we can!

Amen.