

MONDAY
16 MAY
Acts 14:5-18
Psalm 118:1-3, 14-15
John 14:21-26

TUESDAY
17 MAY
Acts 14:19-end
Psalm 145:10-end
John 14:27-end

WEDNESDAY
18 MAY
Acts 15:1-6
Psalm 122:1-5
John 15:1-8

THURSDAY
19 MAY
Acts 15:7-21
Psalm 96:1-3, 7-10
John 15:9-11

FRIDAY
20 MAY
Acts 15:22-31
Psalm 57:8-end
John 15:12-17

SATURDAY
21 MAY
Acts 16:1-10
Psalm 100
John 15:18-21

REFLECTION

Once worked in a Christian book shop.

One day, a regular customer came in, tense with anxiety:

"I need a card for my father. I can't have a 'get well' card because he's not getting better. I can't have a prayer card because he's not a Christian. I can't have a blank card because I don't know what to write. I can't have a 'best wishes' card because wishing is a pagan activity – as Christians we pray and trust God."

After a lengthy but fruitless attempt to put an acceptable spin on "best wishes" I turned to Cruden's Concordance, kept handy for such moments. The matter was resolved by a single reference: Job (the most righteous man who lived) wished he was dead.

Job's wish, while understandable, was of course unrighteous. In Wednesday's reading from John, Jesus appears to write a blank cheque for wishers. We have only to abide in him. And that's just it – abiding in Christ brings renewal of the mind, and with it, the renewal of our wishes.

This week, try to find the words to "Take My Life" by Frances Ridley Havergal, and work through them as your personal prayer.

PRAYER

Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world
and the wonder of your risen life.
Give us compassion and courage
to risk ourselves for those we serve,
to the glory of God the Father.



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GREAT PREACHERS

PART IV – AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354-430)

Many great preachers down the centuries have owed much to what seemed at one stage a highly unlikely source. Born in what is now Algeria, Augustine played truant from school – possibly bored, since a rich family friend noted his intelligence and paid for him to attend university in Carthage at sixteen. While there, to the dismay of his devout Christian mother, Monica, he fell into loose living (not for nothing is he the patron saint of brewers) and joined a heretical sect, the Manicheans, who blended Christianity with other religions.

Despite this, he found time to study rhetoric – a subject he later taught and which heavily influenced not only his own preaching style but the lessons he passed on to later generations of preachers. Yet he had strayed away from his mother's Christian faith and it would take another great preacher to set him on his journey home. Moving to Europe with his mistress and illegitimate child, he heard Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, preach – and was baptised by him. After long struggles with his faith, recorded in his autobiographical *Confessions*, Augustine eventually became bishop of the North African port of Hippo.

Of around fifteen hundred sermons attributed to Augustine nearly half survive, transcribed by a secretary as he spoke. One noticeable thing – given the frankness of his *Confessions* – is the absence of any personal angle. Instead the focus is firmly on either a specific biblical text or an aspect of Christian doctrine. In line with the principles of classical rhetoric, passages vary in style designed to teach, entertain or touch the emotions. Stressing God's grace and mercy, themes developed by the reformer Martin Luther (who was originally a member of the Augustinian order) and John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, he insisted that the guiding principle in studying scripture or doctrine must be love.

Perhaps Augustine's greatest sermon was his life, famously illustrated in his *Confessions*: "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

LIVE
the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
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and
Heather Smith



St. Augustine of Hippo 354-430 AD

Fifth week of Easter

Monday 16 May to
Saturday 21 May
2022

WEEK