

MONDAY
18 MAY
Acts 16:11-15
Psalm 149:1-5
John 15:26 – 16:4

TUESDAY
19 MAY
Acts 16:22-34
Psalm 138
John 16:5-11

WEDNESDAY
20 MAY
Acts 17:15. 22 – 18:1
Psalm 148:1-2. 11-end
John 16:12-15

THURSDAY
21 MAY
Ascension Day
Acts 1:1-11
or Daniel 7:9-14
Psalm 47 or Psalm 93
Ephesians 1:15-end
or Acts 1:1-11
Luke 24:44-end

FRIDAY
22 MAY
Acts 18:9-18
Psalm 47:1-6
John 16:20-23

SATURDAY
23 MAY
Acts 18:22-end
Psalm 47:1-2. 7-end
John 16:23-28

REFLECTION

Did you know that apparently when people sing together their hearts begin to beat in unison? Anyone who sings in a choir, whether in a church or elsewhere, or who sings at a rugby match – and the Welsh know

this very well – will have experienced that spine-tingling, exalted feeling that comes with making a wonderful noise in conjunction with others. You don't even have to be a good singer to experience this effect, but just do it with all your heart. So the psalms set for this week each have the injunction to “sing” in praise of the God who loves faithfully, who answers those who call, who preserves and delivers those who are afraid, and who is worthy of such praise. Those who have advocated for human rights and for justice throughout the ages and across the world have used singing as a way to unite people and to be a force for joy.

Violence and hatred don't sing, they shout slogans, but hope and the longing for a better world are the places of song – songs that may be full of tears as well as full of hope and the promise of a better time. And this God we worship is a God of song.

PRAYER

God of those who sing in hope,
 let us sing of the joy and possibility of your Holy Spirit.
 May we sing out your peace,
 alongside those who care about your creation,
 and in that singing may we find our common bond
 as creatures in your kingdom of hope and delight.



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THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

PART XXII – SONG OF SONGS – A BOOK ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Richard Greatrex continues our book-by-book series about the Bible.

The last of the Wisdom texts, the Song of Songs, is a scriptural conundrum: like the book of Esther it doesn't mention God by name and, although often titled the Song of Solomon, its language dates from the third to fourth century BCE, while Solomon reigned in the tenth. His hundred wives and reputation as a song composer (1 Kings 4:32) may account for the origin of the book's appellation, because it is the Bible's only love poem, told in a dialogue between two lovers. She is a high-born black woman; he a handsome young shepherd. Her words dominate: this is one of the few occasions in the Bible where we hear a woman's perspective directly. But both lovers are uninhibited, explicitly sensual in their expressions of love, admiration for each other's physical beauty, frustration over separation and the bliss of union. The superlatives employed are simultaneously erotic and innocent, redolent with the initial passionate frenzy of young love.

Underpinning this joyous exploration of romantic longing and sexual desire is a mosaic of over 350 cross-references to the Psalms, Proverbs and the Prophets, which align the articulate female lover with Lady Wisdom and open the book to spiritual interpretation. This is certainly how it has been used over the centuries: for Jewish interpreters it is an allegory of God's love for Israel, while for Christians it represents either Christ's love for the Church or God's relationship with the individual soul. Throughout the Church's first sixteen centuries, Song of Songs was one of the most deeply studied books, drawing out key commentaries and reflections from the likes of Ambrose of Milan, Gregory of Nyssa, Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux and Teresa of Avila. It also provided the inspiration behind John of the Cross' mystical poetry. Whether an allegory of the soul's yearning for God or simply celebrating human love, the Song of Songs offers searching, affirming insights into the vulnerability and vitality of passionate physical, emotional and spiritual relationships.

LIVE the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
 THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
 Caroline Hodgson
 and
 Heather Smith



Sixth week of Easter

Monday 18 May to
 Saturday 23 May
 2020

WEEK