Devotional Reflection, Friday, August 28, 2026
Proper 16, the week of the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

God in the Belly

Key phrases for reflection from today's reading:
37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."' 39Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The full text of today's Gospel reading can be found at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 981)
AM Psalm 16, 17; PM Psalm 22
Job 9:1-15,32-35; Acts 10:34-48; John 7:37-52

Today we celebrate the Feast of Augustine of Hippo. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Augustine/Life-retold(See below.)

David's Reflections

Jesus says, in today's Gospel, that living waters shall flow out of his belly. Whose belly? As an English teacher in high school and college, I taught students not to use a pronoun with an indefinite antecedent. In other words, it should be clear to whom a "he," "she," or "it" refers from the preceding text. The New Revised Standard translates verse 38, "out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." That translation, which includes a bit of interpretation, removes an ambiguity from the text. Literally, the Greek original in our reading says, "Out of *his* belly. . . " The antecedent to that pronoun is indefinite. The translators of The New Revised Standard Version made a choice to remove the indefinite "his" and have it refer to the believer.

However, it might be Spirit flowing out of Jesus' belly. Jesus could have been saying that he himself is the source of the Holy Spirit, making him the antecedent to the pronoun *his*. And, the words of verse 39, as well as the whole tenor of the theology of John, seem to point in that direction. The believer receives the Spirit; Jesus gives the Spirit. Many believed that the Messiah's coming would be marked by a rebirth of prophecy and a fresh outpouring of the Spirit John alone records the scene of Jesus breathing on his disciples after the resurrection and giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 20). Living water flowing out of his belly.

God's Spirit, the Triune presence of God, dwells in every person who takes the risk of faith in Jesus Christ. Holy Baptism brings the anointing of the Spirit to the newly baptized. That presence can prove so gentle that we can forget that we are not alone. And, conversely, that presence can express itself with such force that we feel lifted beyond our natural abilities. God's presence, which includes the presence of Jesus his Son as Spirit, works actively in our hearts. Love, strength, and transforming energy can geyser up from within. We have God in our belly.

Jesus' teaching, as recorded in Matthew, also infers that he is present in those we might not identify as believers (See Matthew 25:31ff). God's love, present and active in all people, draws all people to Godself. If that be the case, evangelism and mission are about sparking people to awaken to the ever-present Christ. We promise in our baptismal vows to seek and serve Christ in all people.

Today, remember—Christ lives within. You are not alone. He who walked the roads of Galilee and Jerusalem walks with you and lives in you. More freedom and more options for action, believing, and feeling are possible than we can imagine. You have God in your belly, a fountain of living water.

Cistercian monk and mystic Thomas Merton captures that possibility in one of my favorite poems.
"The Victory"

Make ready for the Christ,
Whose smile,
like lightening
Sets free the song of everlasting glory

That now sleeps,
in your paper flesh,
like dynamite.+

+Thomas Merton, *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1946), p. 115.

Collect of the Day, Proper 16, The thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 232-233)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Augustine of Hippo, bishop and theologian (died 28 Aug 430 CE).
http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Augustine_Hippo.htm
https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Augustine/Life-retold

Collect of the Feast of the Feast of Augustine of Hippo
Lord God, the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the hearts that serve you: Help us, following the example of your servant, Augustine of Hippo, so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whose service is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Fridays
Lord Jesus Christ, by your death you took away the sting of death: Grant to us your servants so to follow in faith where you have led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in you and wake up in your likeness; for your tender mercies' sake. *Amen*. (BCP, 123)

Prayer to the Spirit
"Welcome Holy Spirit, come and set us free! Let each one catch the living flame and be ravished by your love! Let our souls glow with your fire. Help us overcome our forgetfulness of Spirit."

[Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), p. 9.]

In the Order of Worship for Evening
Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening. As you have protected us in the day that is past, so be with us in the coming night; keep us from every sin, every evil, and every fear; for you are our light and salvation, and the strength of our life. To you be glory for endless ages. *Amen*. (BCP, 113)

A Collect for Mission
O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 125)

Daily Office Gospel, John 7:37-52
37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."' 39Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. 40When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, 'This is really the prophet.' 41Others said, 'This is the Messiah.' But some asked, 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? 42Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?' 43So there was a division in the crowd because of him. 44Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

45 Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' 46The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' 47Then the Pharisees replied, 'Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? 48Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.' 50Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, 51'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does

it?' 52They replied, 'Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.'

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer
Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*