

Wiping away the tears

Julia McGuinness *reflects on* Revelation 7:9-end

For most of us, the greatest indignity we will suffer for our faith might be a bit of ridicule. In 2014, the US Centre for the Study of Global Christianity estimated that 100,000 Christians across the world die every year through being targeted because of their faith.

This is nothing new. In Revelation, John's words addresses seven small church communities scattered across Asia Minor, who are at the sharp end of religious persecution. His prophetic vision responds to their situation by revealing, in image and symbol, the eternal destiny of Christians in the midst of hard times.

Our passage is a window into the heavenly throne room, where those who have kept faith in the Lord to the end are gathered

in joyful praise of Jesus. This is no marginalised minority. Every tribe and nation is represented in a vast drama of worship. All are celebrating the victory of Jesus. Their pure white robes reflect the righteousness in which grace has clothed them.

Beyond the chaos and cruelty of this hostile world, John shows believers the reality of a beautiful heavenly order overflowing into spontaneous song – a place where God not only provides complete shelter and sustenance, but even reaches down in tenderness from the throne to wipe away tears.

Whatever our current suffering for the Gospel's sake, here we're encouraged with a glimpse of the glorious future that God has in store. ☺



Lord, when pain clouds our spirits and threatens to dull our faith, help us to live our present in the peace you have secured for us in the past, assured of the future joys you have prepared for us. Amen.

World Tsunami Awareness Day

by Lisa Tulfer

Prior to Boxing Day 2004, few people in the West had heard of tsunamis, but to millions of people in vulnerable coastal communities around the world they are a daily concern. From the Japanese *tsu* (harbour) and *nami* (wave), tsunamis are waves caused by underwater disturbances such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Walls of water destroy all before them, and the debris is picked up by subsequent waves and turned into battering rams.

Over the past century, fifty-eight tsunamis have killed more than 260,000 people. The 2004 tsunami, with waves up to thirty metres high which in places advanced over two kilometres inland, caused an estimated 227,000 deaths in fourteen countries around the Indian Ocean and displaced an estimated 1.7 million people.

People of faith often wrestle with the fact that the natural world which God created can be not only awe-inspiringly beautiful but also powerfully destructive.

www.un.org/en/observances/tsunami-awareness-day ☺

“The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 14:17

The Bible through the week

by Richard Greatrex

Continuing our look at the Bible readings for the coming week, from Monday to Saturday.

Both Paul, in the later stages of his letter to the Romans, and Jesus, in this week's Lukan Gospel readings, are concerned with what makes a true and faithful community. Paul explains his theology to people he hasn't met, so in Tuesday's reading (Romans 12:5-16) he recapitulates his imagery (from 1 Corinthians 12), about the Church as the body of Christ, each contributing their own distinctive gifts as part of the whole. This leads him to explain

how love is vital for a flourishing, healthy community.

The neighbourliness and inclusivity of God's heavenly banquet opens this week's Gospel readings (Luke 14:12-14); but then, in Wednesday's reading (Luke 14:25-33), as Jesus embarks on the road to Jerusalem and the cross, Luke switches to a theme of journeying.

Addressing large crowds, Jesus makes it clear that to be his disciple is a tough calling. As Paul testifies, however, the results are a transformed society that strives, through fallible, faltering faith, to bring every individual, forgiven and restored, to feast at God's table. ☺