

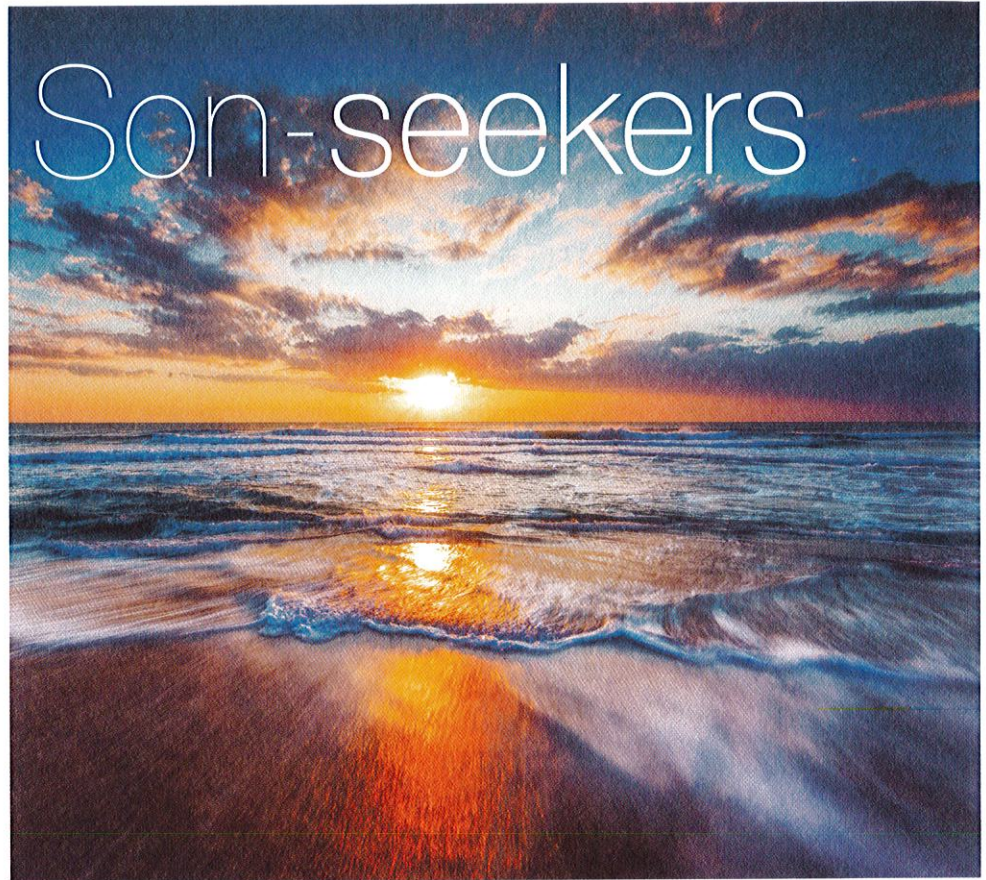
Julia McGuinness *reflects on* Psalm 19

From a golden-coral dawn to a jewelled sparkle of stars, the splendid beauty of the skies evokes wonder. In them we sense the signature of the Creator. Our response echoes that of the psalmist. As he contemplates the sun's orderly circuit across the heavens, his thoughts turn to the direction of human lives.

God has set the sun's course, but allows humankind free will to choose our own pathway. Our lives are best lived, not by random self-pleasing, but according to God's order. Through the law, God signposts how we may follow the course for which we have been created. The rebellious spirit of our age rails against this as limitation. The psalmist sees it as liberation. The law is no dry guide. It generates life-giving renewal and rich insight.

The law acts as spiritual sunlight. Under its penetrating rays we can see how we are out of kilter with God's will. Without such light from above, we have only the markers of the behaviour of those around us, and are liable to follow other people's agendas. The law may shine a light on the psalmist's hidden faults, but he welcomes the exposure that enables him to get back on track.

As Christians, we are called to be Son-seekers, allowing the Living Word to guide us for our good, so our lives shine with God's glory. ☺



Lord, from self-help to sales talk and spin, we are bombarded daily by words that would direct our actions. Help us to treasure your word, allowing its truth to guide our actions and its power to transform our lives. Amen.

Autumn thoughts

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness

by Julian Smith

Was John Keats describing a real autumn when he wrote these words, or imagining an ideal autumn? Real or idealised, such autumns might seem to be things of the past. Today's poets might write of heatwaves and forest fires, earthquakes and floods. For some autumn is a season of plenty, but for many it is the precursor to disaster-induced famine. God's world around us is changing fast.

The feeding of the five thousand in John was our Gospel reading at the end of July. John describes it as a "sign", not a miracle, which points to many things. The sign points to Jesus' compassion and his desire for his disciples to be active and practical in their care.

As Christ's body, his hands and feet, we are called to exercise his compassion in practical ways – feeding those who are hungry, sheltering those who are homeless and caring for the casualties of this fast-changing world. ☺

“God is faithful even when his children are not.”

Max Lucado (born 1955), American author and pastor

Books of the Old Testament

Part 29 – Joel

by Richard Greatrex

The book of Joel is short – three chapters full of vivid, at times brutally descriptive language. We know nothing about the prophet, even the dates of his activity are contentious, although many scholars suggest a timeframe between 500 and 350 BC, after Israel has fallen.

Despite its brevity the book of Joel is significant for Christians – being cited by Peter during his explanation of Pentecost in Acts 2 and by Paul to describe

one principal strand of his understanding of the Gospel: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32).

In the opening verses, Joel instructs his readers that his words are for all generations, not just his own time. His message of the coming day of the Lord reminds us that no one is exempt from the need for repentance and trust in God, which leads to transformation through divine grace, a message that Paul declares is truly fulfilled in Christ. ☺