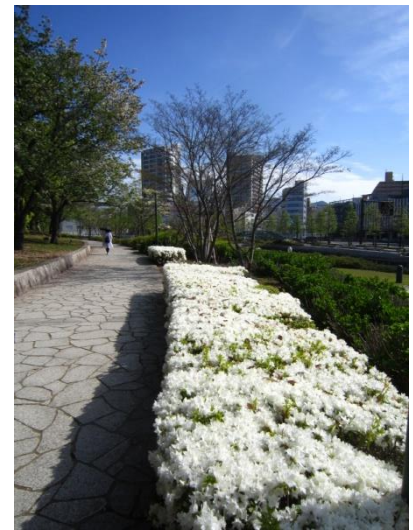




For everything there is a season  
Eccl. 3:1

Nagasaki, May 2019



The cherry blossoms (up above where I live) have come and gone, giving way to the azaleas (in the park just down the hill). And the Heisei Era, which began not so long after I came to Japan, has ended with the abdication of the last emperor, and given way to the new Reiwa Era.



As I write, we are coming to the end of an unprecedented 10 day holiday period in Japan, and the main news stories are of crowded airports, stations and trains, and 15-20 mile traffic jams on the expressways. Japanese custom dictates that a day which falls between two public holidays becomes a holiday itself, and if a public holiday falls on a Sunday, the Monday following becomes a holiday instead. As April 29<sup>th</sup>, May 3<sup>rd</sup> and May 5<sup>th</sup> are holidays, May 4<sup>th</sup> has also become one, and the period is known every year as Golden Week. By deciding to install the new emperor on May 1<sup>st</sup>, and making that day a public holiday, the government made April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup> public holidays by default too, and as the 5<sup>th</sup> is a Sunday, the 6<sup>th</sup> becomes a holiday, meaning that many people finished work on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> and will go back on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup>.

SAT	SUN	MON	(TUE)	WED	(THU)	FRI	SAT	SUN	(MON)
27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6

Although our high school will follow this pattern, at the university we will have lectures on the 6<sup>th</sup>, as having too many Monday holidays disrupts the class schedule. Whether the students will turn up or not remains to be seen! However, many of them work part-time in shops, hotels and restaurants, and so will have been roped in to help so that the regular staff could get at least some time off (shops here don't close for Sundays or public holidays), so they may be quite happy to come back to classes for a rest...

The name for the new era was announced on April 1<sup>st</sup>, which is the beginning of the academic and business year, but this left people concerned that new names first seen on the internet might be April Fools jokes. April 1<sup>st</sup> is the beginning of the church year too, and so the various groups tend to have meetings for reflection during March. For the choir, this means going out for a meal together, confirming that we are not yet giving up (I wouldn't dare calculate our average age!) and

expressing appreciation for faithful service. And the soup we enjoyed reflected the season – the pink colour is actually achieved with red beans, but yes, those are cherry blossoms on top, and yes, they are edible.

The “extraordinary” church AGM to elect the elders and determine the budget for the coming year takes place in March, whereas the regular AGM with all the reports takes place in April. So we look forward in March and look back in April!



Japan as a whole tends to like to look back at the best of times, but this has been especially true with the change of era, with light-hearted as well as more serious TV programmes on anything from favourite foods to disasters in the last era. Then there have been all the “last times” and “first times” to be celebrated, and all kinds of commemorative goods as Heisei gave way to Reiwa.



These “manju” (buns filled with sweet bean paste) were being handed out on May 1<sup>st</sup> by one of the department stores in the city centre. “Red” (or pink in this case!) and white are the celebration colours, and the wrapping paper says that the store offers congratulations on the installation of the new emperor. And although they were free, the “manju” did work as a sales promotion, as I then felt obliged to go in and buy something...

At church we have, of course, celebrated Easter, and then an adult baptism the following week, as the person concerned often works on Sundays and could not attend worship on either Easter or Pentecost, which would be more usual times for baptisms. She started coming to church after her mother, who had been one of the church stalwarts all her life, died last year. I am reminded of an episode related by Brother Andrew who was asked to preach at a funeral behind the (then) Iron Curtain and was surprised to be told to make his sermon a hard-hitting piece of evangelism. The pastor said that weddings and funerals were the only times that most people would come to church, and that a local official had commented that the pastor must be hoping for his members to die so the he could evangelise the congregation at the funeral. Well, we certainly aren’t hoping for our members to die, but we have seen a number of baptisms recently of people who have started to come to church and found faith after the attending the funeral of a Christian member of the family.

And finally, on a completely different topic... As Japan turns from looking back to looking forward, as well as constant reminders that the 2020 Olympics will be held in Tokyo, increasing attention is being given to preparations for the Rugby World Cup to be held here later this year. This was the countdown sign (185 days to go) I saw in the station in Oita when a Scottish friend, Jill, came to visit in the spring break and we went travelling together. She would like the sign below, now hanging in the shopping precinct here, which announces that the Scottish team is coming to Nagasaki in September, and suggests “Let’s all support them!” This might not best



please the Methodists I have heard from who are coming for the RWC, and on a tour that takes in Nagasaki, who are Irish! I am looking forward to meeting them then – if others reading this will be visiting Japan for the RWC, do feel free to get in touch.



Sheila