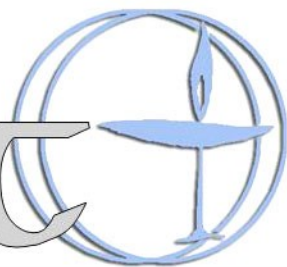


# Oscailt



July 2023

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.19 Nº 7



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**Oscailt** since January 2005 has become the monthly magazine for Irish Unitarians. Originally it was the calendar for Dublin but due to popular demand by non members this new format was born and continues to grow and flourish.

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**Front Cover:** Detail from the Wilson Memorial Window.  
(photo P.Spain)

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Our magazine title, **Oscailt**, is inspired by the account of the **Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man** in St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 7. Jesus commands the mans ears to open up with Aramic word "Ephphatha" - open ! The Irish word *oscailt*, (from the verb *oscail*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

# BELIEVE or THINK?

Believe is an odd word, often used nowadays with a new meaning. It is over-used, often by politicians who say such things as “I believe that our policies will improve everything” when what they mean is, “I think” or “I hope” or even “this is arrant nonsense but vote for me anyway”.

We are taught to believe as children. The luckier ones are told about the tooth fairy, amongst others. So a small child of 5 or 6 has her first wobbly tooth, and now believes that the fairy will buy it if it is left in the designated place (under a glass on the kitchen table, in my case, the fairy didn’t like messing about with pillows in the dark). But then the tooth falls out, and lo and behold, the fairy pays up! Does this gap-toothed child believe in the tooth fairy? No. She Knows, she is certain. There IS a tooth fairy.

Less lucky children are told a lot of stuff about their religion of birth, and are asked to believe it, which they mostly do. But the proof never arrives. They have to go on believing, or stop. Most of you will have driven some sort of path wobbling between the two options, of belief, because you were told to believe, or unbelief, because there has been no proof.

But there *is* a third way. Some of us have found “I think”. I am one of those. Maybe I have come to this because as a child I was never asked to believe anything, and I remember the moment, at just four, of the loss of belief in the one thing I *had* ever believed. What I think about the world, and life and death, comes from observation, and reading, and occasionally from gut feelings. I have told some of you this story, but for the others here goes:

Years ago I was in a ‘*Relais Routiers*’ restaurant in southern France, having a cheap and cheerful lunch. We had finished our main course, and I said to my husband, “Order me the chocolate mousse, I’ll be back” and set off to the loo. *Relais Routiers* are often shabby buildings, and in those days this one had a dark narrow corridor leading down a gentle slope to the toilets. There was light coming into the end of the corridor at the left. As I went along, I found myself walking a bit taller, settling my breathing, and throw-

ing my shoulders back a little. This lasted for about ten paces, I was at the end, and the light on the left was from the window above the toilet cistern. I felt a wave of disappointment. Mad, of course, I'd come to the loo and there it was, so what was the problem? I sat on that toilet and asked myself, "What was I expecting?" I closed my eyes, and after a moment, I saw it: an expanse of sand, and further away, thousands of people sitting on the stone seats of an arena. I sensed heat, and cheerful noise. I had thrown myself into a distant past. My feelings walking down that dark sloping passage were those of an entertainer about to go on stage, I recognised it from my amateur drama experiences. I assume that the reason this happened is that the slope, the dark, and the light from the side exactly recalled a passageway I had walked along somewhere in the bowels of an arena of the Roman Empire.

This was my first hint that I might have lived before. I have learnt regression therapy since then, and have visited that ancient North African life in more detail, so I can tell you it seems that I was a comic juggler, the warm -up man before the gladiators came on.

So, do I *believe* in reincarnation? No. But do I *think* it is a possibility? Yes, I do. After I published my novels, both with a past-life theme, a few people have said to me, "I don't believe in reincarnation". That's fine, it is utterly ridiculous, of course....

But why are these people using "I don't believe"? Did anyone ever ask them to believe in past lives, so that this lack of belief is a repudiation? Probably not. Our whole society is based on "our one wild and precious life," and "life isn't a dress rehearsal". There is little to fight against. And as Unitarians we use Reason, after all.

But I didn't use Reason to come to my opinion about reincarnation. I started by using my own experience, as real in feelings as any I've had in my present life. But then I found out other things that firmed up my thoughts. The first is that Regression Therapy, visiting the past, can cure. In other words, a person may have an inexplicable problem, one that will be called irrational. Claustrophobia, for example. We probably all have a little of this, as a protection against idiocy – after all, only a few people take up pot-holing. But some people get the screaming ab-dabs when asked to lie still in an MRI tube, even though they know rationally that there are staff there to ensure their well-being, and that they could proba-

bly wriggle out of the machine if they had to, as there is no locked door. Those people, if regressed to the initiating cause of the problem, will usually find a this-life or past-life experience that explains it, from being walled up and left to die, getting trapped by a landfall or collapsing building, or simply being the butt of some childish prank. About half of people will find the problem in a story that does not belong to this life. Once proper energy work is done by an experienced therapist, the cause of the fear can be left in the past where it belongs. (It is not usually enough just to see the cause, the work must be done).

The other thing is the evidence. Once I began to think that reincarnation might be how things work, I read with interest cases of people who have experienced past-lives so recent that they have been able to be investigated. You may have heard of Jenny Cockell, an English woman who had dreams of dying in Ireland leaving a young family. She found those children, then in their 70s, and they were featured on the Late Late show, when they said that they did accept that Jenny was their late mother. A Dr. Jim Tucker has researched a number of cases of children who report such things as dying in a previous time, and has been able to check the information about the previous lives lived. Others have claimed to have debunked his work, but I find their de-bunkings as least as incredible as Dr Tucker's cases. You can check for yourselves and see what you think. One famous case is that of James Leininger. James was born in 1998 and was just under 2 when, after a visit to an aviation museum, he started having nightmares and saying "airplane crash on fire" and "little man can't get out", and crashing his toy planes nose first into the table. He told his parents he had been shot by the Japanese, and that his plane, a Corsair, had flown off a boat. He gave details which were not shown to him in the museum. He said the boat was "Natoma". It turns out there was a USS Natoma Bay which was involved in the Iwo Jima area. When they asked little James who the 'little man' was, he only said 'me' or 'James'. The only pilot to be lost off the Natoma Bay was a James Huston. Further enquiries made it seem quite likely that the modern child had been James Huston. Now, one can say this is all fantasy, or made up for attention by the parents. But all they got out of it was the profits off the one book they published, hardly worth years of dissembling, and as they did not start off as people who 'believed'

in reincarnation, being from an evangelical Christian background, they probably risked a good bit of mockery. Many stories have not been publicised. I have a friend whose daughter, when very young, asked one day “where are my other Daddies?” My friend assumed the child was referring to her uncles, and told her Uncle Tom and Uncle Paul were at their own houses. “No!” said the little girl, “not them, my seven other Daddies!” Many very young children come out with stuff like this, but as their parents don’t recognise the questions for what they are, they give some irrelevant answer, and after a few attempts the child stops asking.

I am as convinced by some random things that happen during the sessions I facilitate. One person, doing a “past life regression” just for curiosity, found himself in the life of a monk. It seemed to be a Nepalese or Tibetan situation. But the beliefs were not Buddhist, this appeared to be from an earlier time. My client said that he, the monk, was feeling hungry, so I said, “go forward in time to when you next eat” and there was a pause, followed by an expression of surprise. “I thought it would be rice” he said, “but it’s little bits of fatty meat”. These are the convincing moments, when the client sees what they didn’t expect. And by the way, regression clients do not find themselves in the lives of royalty. They are mostly serfs and foot-soldiers, ordinary people just as we are now.

To me, there are only two rational explanations for the big questions of why are we here, and what’s it all about anyway. One, the materialist viewpoint, is that our distant ancestors crawled out of the slime by accident, fought their way to the atom bomb and TikTok, and will cease to exist when they take their last breath. Life is all we have, there’s no purpose to any of it, and all we can do is be nice to ourselves and others while we’re here.

The other explanation that I think is possible is that we have all been here before, and will be again, and that there is a purpose to our doing this. Annabel’s song is saying this, that we can’t see the pattern of our existence because we are in it, but if we could rise above it and look down, it would become clear. So I’m not going to try to explain to you how it is all organised, or who or what is in charge. I don’t think we can possibly know, we are far too small and ignorant. Imagine an ant gets into the church and finds itself at the foot of one of the legs of the table. Do we expect it, by smelling the table leg, to divine how flowers are grown, or how pottery or

glass is made to provide the vase, or how the vase got filled with water? We are that ant, but we jump to all sorts of conclusions about the very existence of vases of flowers on inexplicable tables. Our ant-like ancestors sat round, maybe in groups, or maybe after breathing in some interesting smoke, and wrote books that explain it all. Some of these books are now considered to be the word of god, whatever that is.

I don't *believe* that there is a person watching over me, but I *think* it's possible, call it God, guardian angel or spirit guide, as you will. Also, for what it's worth, I think it's unlikely that this existence is controlled and organised by one all-powerful being. It's far more likely to be being organised by a committee, which would explain much. I don't think everything that happens was planned, there are definitely some accidents. But it seems to me at least possible that we are all here to try to improve ourselves, with some sort of plan about how we will do that. And some of us are allowed to bring talents with us that we have been working on over several previous lives, to smooth our path. I don't remember learning to read, I could do it fluently at 5, and reading was a great comfort to me in my lonely childhood. Others are called prodigies for being able to play instruments at very young ages – maybe these are souls who have been practising for centuries.

In one sense it is probable that we only live once. I will never be Madeline again. I will not have this body, this brain, this amount of IQ. I will be in another body, with a different amount of intelligence, another personality, and different abilities. I hope I will be able to sing in tune. But a deeper part of me, my soul, will carry on.

This is why thinking that we may all have existed before, and will again, is so important, and why I hope more people come to think it may be possible. Because if, for example, a Ku Klux Klan member thought he had a good chance of coming into a life with a black skin next time, he might be less keen on some of his ghastly activities. If a misogynist knew he could be female next time, he might do something about improving the lot of women. The risk might take action to improve things for the poor. The same applies for all types of different existences. We have mostly done them all. I certainly remember several male lives, and ones in different religions and ethnic groups. I have had some male clients very surprised to find themselves living a female life. As an aside, in my



experience of bringing people through a past life death and into the afterlife, not once has anyone reported that the religion they followed while alive was of any significance once they were dead.

I think, I hope, that when I die I will still be me in some sense, and will go off into a future of new experiences. Not of reward and punishment, but of new learning and friendship. I really can't go with the traditional option, of being in "Heaven" for eternity. "Your children crowned, all in white shall wait around" as Once in Royal David's City has it, sounds utterly hellish. If I am wrong, and the materialist option, of a black curtain falling, is the truth, I have lost nothing and will not know. But if those who choose "not to believe" in some sort of life after death are wrong, they are going to be a bit confused to find themselves still conscious as the funeral directors are called. I think I'm going with the easier option.

*Madeline Stringer*

Amen.                      Address for 21<sup>st</sup> May 2023

# FISH AND CHIPS ANYONE?

Before lockdown, this was the busiest day of the year for fish-and-chip shops. And even today they'll no doubt be doing a roaring business. Why eat fish on Good Friday? It used to be thought (and probably still is in some circles) that people were just abstaining from meat and using fish as a substitute. But this is a lame idea. In the ancient world, everyone, except the very rich, would abstain from meat for most of the week, if not most of the year!

Among the earliest Christians, eating fish on Friday was a deliberate act of communing with Christ.

The very first symbol of Christianity was not the Cross it was the FISH. The first Christian creed ('Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour') was based around an acrostic using the letters of the Greek word for FISH.

Jesus fed the crowds on bread and FISH. Twice.

Peter was told he would find a coin in a FISH'S mouth.

In John's Gospel, (Chapter 21) we read about the miraculous catch of 153 FISH. (Why such a number? Who counted them? Why?)

FISH, FISHING, and FISHERMEN are mentioned 28 times in the Gospels. You can see the FISH symbol in the ancient catacombs and nowadays you can see it on the back of the cars and on the lapel badges of Christian evangelicals. (If only they knew!)

A Bishop's mitre looks like a FISH's head! (If only THEY knew!) Why is Jesus associated with FISH? Surely a fish is not a fitting symbol for a hero?



A place of worship since 1717

## **UNITARIAN CHURCH**

Prince's Street, Cork.

Registered Charity Number 0000246

**Service: Sundays at 11a.m.**

*Minister:-* Rev. Mike O'Sullivan Telephone: 023-8842800

e-mail:- [osullmike@gmail.com](mailto:osullmike@gmail.com) Mobile 087-9539998

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**Treasurer :** Brian Cluer e-mail: [bmcleur@gmail.com](mailto:bmcleur@gmail.com)

**Secretary :** Colm Noonan : e-mail : [colm.noonan@gmail.com](mailto:colm.noonan@gmail.com)

**[www.unitarianchurchcork.com](http://www.unitarianchurchcork.com)**

**Jazz Vespers,  
first Friday of the month @ 6pm.**

An ecumenical service with the Methodist church.

## **Please Note**

*If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell, or who has suffered a bereavement, and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please e-mail Rev.Bridget Spain.*

Vestry 01 - 4780638

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

### **Childrens Programme - Sunday Club**

Takes place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email  
Denise at [sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

### **DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH**

**Lunch-time service every Wednesday from 1.10 to 1.40 p.m.**

Each week Eileen Delaney sends an e-mail circular as to what is happening in the church and the other activities associated with the church.

If you would like to receive this information you should send your details requesting your name be added to the list to:-  
[eileendelaney76@gmail.com](mailto:eileendelaney76@gmail.com)



# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for July 2023**

2 <sup>nd</sup> July	<i>Sex, and all that stuff</i>
Service	Paul Murray
Reader	Frank Kelly
Flowers	Paula Mills
Welcomers	Grainne Carty, Frank Kelly
Coffee	Michael Robinson, Paula Mills, Tony Shine
-----	
9 <sup>th</sup> July	<i>The Beyondness of Understanding.</i>
Service	Gavin Byrne
Reader	Andrew Connolly Crangle
Flowers	Colette Douglas
Welcomers	Janet Mulroy, Emer O'Reilly
Coffee	Janet Mulroy, Catherine Cook, Gavin Byrne
-----	
16 <sup>th</sup> July	<i>Who do you Love ?</i>
Service	Will O'Connell
Reader	Emer O'Reilly
Flowers	Janet Mulroy
Welcomers	Emer O'Reilly, Catharine Cook
Coffee	Michael Robinson, Paul Murray
-----	
23 <sup>rd</sup> July	<i>Seeking Refuge</i>
Service	Tony Brady
Reader	Paul Murray
Flowers	Karen O
Welcomers	Michael Robinson, Lorraine Doyle
Coffee	Maeve Edwards, Sean Fontana, Karen O
-----	
30 <sup>th</sup> July	<i>Why do you go to Church ?</i>
Service	Aidan O'Driscoll
Reader	Gavin Byrne
Flowers	Lorenzo Casella
Welcomers	Lorenzo Casella, Grainne Carty
Coffee	Sean Fontana

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.  
On our WebCam, click and connect at [www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

Recordings of previous services are also available on the website.

LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH  
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT  
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.

TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE  
TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM  
TO SERVE MANKIND IN FELLOWSHIP  
TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL GROW IN HARMONY  
WITH THE DIVINE  
THIS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH GOD.

## **DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH**

112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23, Ireland.  
Unitarian Church - Dublin Registered Charity Number 20000622

**Service: Sunday at 11a.m.      Phone: Vestry 01-4780638**

**Managing committee:-** Chairperson: Denise Dunne;  
Vice Chairman: Dennis Aylmer; Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;  
Tony Shine; Andy Pollak; Peter White; Will O'Connell; Collette Douglas;  
Malachy Hevehan; Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne.

[www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

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Rev. Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

**Chairperson: Denise Dunne:-** Tel: 087-2450660

**Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy:-** Tel: 087-9346720

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**Treasurer: Rory Delany:** 087-2217414,

e-mail: [treasurerunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:treasurerunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

**Musical Director: Josh Johnston :-** 086 892 0602

**Caretaker: Kevin Robinson** Telephone: 4752781

Recordings of the church services are available on the church website.

The answer is simple. It is based on the astronomical phenomenon called 'the precession of the equinoxes'. At the time of the Spring Equinox, the Sun's position relative to the constellations of the zodiac changes very gradually, moving one degree every 72 years, and changing constellations every two thousand years or so. Such a momentous change in the sky pattern was thought to correspond with a momentous change in spiritual consciousness. The Bible describes the 'pass over' of the equinoctial Sun from Taurus (the Bull) into Aries (the Ram or Lamb) in the story of the Exodus. (What do the Jews eat at Passover?) And it describes the 'pass over' from Aries to Pisces (the Fish) in the story of Jesus.

Why Friday? Because Friday is the day of Venus (Venerdi, Vendredi, in the Romance languages) the planet said to be 'exalted' in Pisces.

There may or may not be history in the Gospels, but there is certainly astronomy in them and we have chosen to ignore it.

Something to think about next time  
you're eating your fish-and-chips!

# *Swift Boxes*

Today is Earth Day, which has been running every year since 1970, and is a day dedicated to the protection of the environment. One of the things we are trying to do as a church is to help to re-establish one form of bird life in our locality.

We are very fortunate in that around our church we have lots of animal and bird life. At this time of year the squirrels are very noticeable in the grounds but also so many different types of birds.

As a congregation and working with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) we hope to help one species of bird re-establish itself in Dunmurry, the Swift. At the end of March, Monika Wojcieszek, Assistant Conservation Officer of the RSPB, introduced us to this project to encourage Swifts to nest on our premise by hosting an information evening in the McCleery Hall. We were joined by representatives from different local churches.

Swifts are described as being medium sized, plain sooty brown in colour with a white throat. And when they are in flight they have long, scythe-like wings with a short forked tail. They weigh about 40g which is actually very little. But they pair for life and every year come back to the same nesting site. This is where we can help them, by putting up nesting boxes. The RSPB provided us with 8 nesting boxes. In April a working group, made up of congregation members, put up the nesting boxes on the wall of the McCleery Hall that runs parallel to the graveyard.

Swifts are migratory birds, they breed all over Europe up as far as the Arctic Circle. Most of the time they live in Africa and they fly back to Europe to breed. They only stay in Northern Ireland for about 100 days, they are among the last migratory birds to arrive and the first to leave. But the time here is crucial because this is where their young are born.

They start to arrive towards the end of April looking for places to nest and stay here until August. Unfortunately human beings have done so much to damage their natural habitat that it is important that we do something to provide them with places to nest which is why we are helping by providing nesting boxes.

Most of these birds live in Central Africa or Mozambique in



South East Africa, thousands of miles away. When they fly here they fly across tropical rainforests, across West Africa and across the edge of the Sahara desert and France and Spain. Going back they fly over the mountains of North Africa and the coast of West Africa. So if you see a Swift, here or somewhere else, just think of all the places that bird has seen, all the countries, climates and environments.

They are, in fact, the fastest of all the birds, their top speed has been measured and is known to be 69.3 mph. It's estimated that they fly 500 miles a day and about 1.24 million miles in their lifetime. They do everything on the wing and only land to nest when they get here. They live a perpetual aerial life and can sleep with half of their brain at a time. They drink by catching rain drops or gliding over smooth water and take sips. They hunt over a wide range of habitats and eat airborne small insects.

Now not many predators can catch a Swift but inevitably human beings have impeded their activities by destroying sites here. So by putting up nesting boxes we will be doing such a favour to these little creatures.

If Swifts do come to nest here each pair will lay about 2-3 eggs and the parents take turns to incubate the eggs. After about three weeks they will hatch and the young birds will be able to fly themselves in between 35-49 days. They would come back to the same place for nesting themselves which is why we need a number of nesting boxes and why other churches in the locality will try and do the same as us.

We don't know if Swifts will come here or not and we might have to transmit a bird call to attract them but we won't know if we don't try and if we do then we will have done something to help one species and to help bring a rebirth and a renewal for wildlife in our part of Dunmurry. *(see photos backcover)*

*Rev.Dr.David Steers*

# A Clear Mind

In the last twenty or thirty years Irish society has changed beyond recognition. The changes are particularly noticeable when it comes to religion. Some of these changes are to be welcomed; the Christian churches are coming out of their denominational trenches and recognise how much they share in common. Religion has lost its power as a form of social control.

The Irish landscape is testament to the perennial importance of religion in Ireland. There are the beehive huts of monks that cling on to the Skellig rocks. There are remains of the early Christian settlements in Clonmacnoise; the great Cathedrals of Dublin are built on the foundations of earlier existing churches. The roofless remains of monasteries are evidence of the ruthless politics of Tudor monarchs.

Our National Museum contains artefacts of great beauty wrought in gold and silver. These were used to house religious texts and relics of the saints. Trinity College displays the Book of Kells - a testament to the learning and religious commitment of Irish monks who kept a light of learning through the dark ages. Our city is dotted with churches; like this building- these churches were built in the halcyon days of the British Empire.

But times have changed; religion has lost its place as the centre of community. Religious conformity that at one time was the heart of Irish Society is now unfashionable. For most people religious practice is reduced to rites of passage; regular attendance at Sunday worship is unusual in fact it's a bit exotic. In a world based on science and a system of social welfare we don't seem to need religion quite as much as we did in the past. It is as if the gloom of religion has dissipated and we are now free to enjoy life.

The falloff in religious practice does not mean that people are any less ethical; Irish people remain charitable and caring. They are more accepting of difference they are less judgmental than in earlier generations were. Remember the exuberant joy when the Marriage Equality Referendum was passed. Many things in our society have changed for the better. However present day society has its own problems; today many people live with a sense of dislocation in their life.

The sense of dislocation is apparent from statistics. Irish society

has a big problem with drinking excessive alcohol; we have a significant drug problem. We have high rates of depression and mental health illness, we have a high rate of consumption of prescription drugs. Many of our citizens live with a belief that Irish society is divided into “them and us”; those who have everything and the rest. To deal with these issues there is the tsunami of self help books; each book holding out the promise to make us beautiful, happy or successful.

The overriding message of modern Society goes something like this:- get a good education, be ambitious, enjoy the fruits of privilege, enjoy sense experiences. The reality is that human beings need a deeper meaning in life. It is as if humans have a gene for the religious impulse; spirituality is a facet of human personality that refuses to be ignored. Religions with all their faults - and they have many - address two deep interconnected human needs. Firstly, religions try to provide for connection with the sacred. The other great need is to develop self understanding. The needs are two sides of the same coin. We will not feel a connection with what we call God if our religion only consists of keeping some arbitrary set of rules. Keeping a set of ethical rules is the first step we take, the second step we take is towards self understanding.

“Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand” the words are a recurring theme in the Christian teaching; they are a particular favourite with fundamentalist Christians who wait in fear for the day of judgement. The word regret in English means to “Feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin” There is a better translation of the word “repent” it is to “turn around utterly” or to take a totally different perspective on something. What if we dismiss the idea of repenting of sin in favour of “turning the entirety of our lives around” or having a new vision of our world?

The teaching of Jesus is often summed up as “love God and love you neighbour as yourself”. The words were used by Jesus to summarise the vast number of Jewish laws. Jesus consistently spoke about the Kingdom of heaven. Effective religion has to move step beyond ethical living. Remember the parable of the rich young man. He asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. The young man keeps all the commandments; what else do I have to do he asks? Jesus tells him to sell his goods, give away the proceeds and come follow him. We know that the young man went away sorrowfully unable to let go of life as he knew it.

The recurring theme in the teaching of Jesus is the kingdom of

heaven. I don't believe that the kingdom of heaven is somewhere up in the clouds where we may or may not go when we die. I think that we are meant to find the Kingdom of heaven in this world, the kingdom of heaven is in the here and now.

So what can we say about the Kingdom of heaven? Remember the story of Jesus and the little children; it's depicted beautifully in our stained glass window. Jesus – in opposition to the adults- blessed the little children; he said that unless we become like little children we cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven. This teaching about the kingdom of heaven is important; we know that it is important because it is related in all three synoptic gospels ( Matthew 19:14 Mark 10: 13-16 Luke 18: 15-17).

Adults perceive the world through the lens of our individual experience; we experience the world through our muddled thinking process. Our perception of the world is formed from our personal history, it comes from the blessings we have experienced; we bring our baggage into the mix. We bring our successes our failures our expectations and our prejudices into how we see the world. Little children see the world differently than us world weary adults.

What are the traits associated children? Children inhabit the present; when they are sad they experience the sadness fully. When they are happy they are totally happy. They never waste time regretting or longing for the past, they do not anticipate the future. Children need connection with their community neither wealth nor status can impress a child. Children give their wholehearted trust to those they meet. Children see everything they encounter with fresh eyes; unburdened by past experiences or preconceptions.

*Rev.Bridget Spain*

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for May 2023.**

**The House by the Davina**

by Eugenie Fraser

This is a memoir of a Russian Childhood by Eugenie Fraser, she was also half Scottish on her mother's side. Eugenie tells the story in her own words and therefore through a child's and teenagers point of view of the period of history in Russia from 1904 to 1920.

Eugenie was born in Archangel, Russia to a Russian father, Ghermain Scholts and Scottish mother, Helen/Nelly Cameron. Her parents met in Scotland while Ghermain was in Dundee trading on behalf of his merchant family in timber. Nelly came from Broughty Ferry and lived with her strict Presbyterian parents but the couple managed to have a courtship and as Eugenie's parents liked Ghermain there were no objections to the marriage. They went to Archangel to live, at first with Ghermain's family whom she got to know really well, especially Ghermain's mother, Babushka with whom she developed a close relationship.

Eugenie (Jenya) and her younger brother Ghermain Jnr were born in Archangel and then went to live in St. Petersburg when her parent's moved there. Jenya became ill at around seven years of age and it was decided that the clean air of Archangel would be better for her so she moved back to her grandmother Babushkas. It is this stage of her life that we read about which has a magical fairy like quality to it as they were part of the landed merchant class of Tsarist Russia. There are vivid descriptions of the Russian landscape throughout the seasons peppered with wonderful horse drawn sled rides along the frozen river in winter and then swimming and sunbathing on the large boulders of the river in summer. Jenya recounts her first Christmas in her Grandmother's house and it was filled with wonder as she saw her first Christmas tree, there were presents for everyone, wonderful food and entertainment. Easter too was a richly celebrated event with candlelit processions to the Russian Orthodox church.

Like most Russian novels there is a plethora of characters to contend with, there's her family and all of her relations past and present as well as the comings and goings of many friends and household staff and servants.

Jenya's grandmother Babushka takes centre stage and not only runs her own household efficiently and in a traditional manner she also seems to be a sort of matriarch for the whole village. She is definitely a force to contend with and was a huge influence on the young Eugenie.

The book gives a great sense of what it was like to live in Russia before World War I, for the Merchants, Beurocrats and Professional classes. There are interactions with the other people such as the servants and locals but only as they come in contact with the household. Eugenie has very little awareness of the peasant class and their living conditions or the social turmoil of the time which brought on the Russian Revolution. This lack of understanding would naturally colour your opinion as a teenager as you saw your life and family being destroyed by the Bolsheviks but sixty years on when writing this memoir there is still no shift in opinion or understanding for Eugenie as to why such an event took place.

When Russia entered the First World War on the side of the Allies against Germany Eugenie's family and friends were fervent patriots with Babushka leading the way with fund raising events and also various family members friends and servants enrolled in the army. Eugenie's father was now living back in Archangel separate to her mother and brother who remained in Petrograd until late 1916. Ghermain Snr had Multiple Sclerosis and he was deteriorating very fast, a constant source of worry for all of the family. There were several Allied Naval Ships stationed in Archangel defending Momansk and Archangel from German invasion. The Allies were welcomed by Eugenies family and bartered for food supplies and they became very friendly with them. Eugenie's Grandfather was a doctor and surgeon and worked in the hospital, he did not discriminate against whom he treated which would be used against him in the coming future.

In early 1917 word came of the Revolution which was first received with mixed feelings but there was hope that it would end the war with Germany, this took several months to achieve so by October Russia was out of the war and the Bolsheviks embarked on a campaign to overtake all of Russia. The Allies Intervention ended and they finally left Archangel in 1919.

This started a time of turmoil deprivation and hunger for everyone but especially for those of Eugenie's class and supporters of the White Russian Army. There were reprisals, homes were ransacked

and robbed, people vanished and were arrested, as was Eugenies grandfather the doctor who was sent to a prison camp which was a fate better than many prisoners who were executed in the woods. As with any Civil War the bitterness ran deep.

In late 1920 her beloved Babushka got permission to join her Grandfather in the prison. It was the last she would ever see of her.

Eugenie, her brother and mother were finally given permission to leave Russia temporarily to visit her family in Scotland. Her father was too ill to travel so he had to remain behind, again another final farewell. This was a nail biting journey for them as they were searched, interrogeted, endured filthy conditions on a trawler which brought them to Vardo in Norway where they then went to Bergen and finally on to Newcastle and Scotland. Thus began a new episode to their lives in the West.

The book club readers had mixed reviews of the book but overall it was seen as a very interesting account of a time and place in history. A book well worth reading.

*Alison Claffey*



*Photographs provided by members of  
Dunmurry congregation and  
Rev.Dr.David Steers*



**Nesting boxes on the wall of the McCleery Hall (see page 10)**