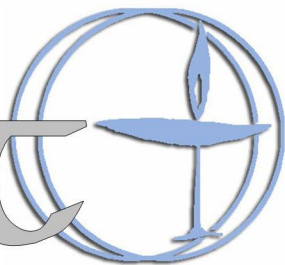


Oscailt



August 2023

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.19 Nº 8



City Walks Plus

Our customary *Summer Walks* around the city will take place directly after Sunday Service on 20th of August and on 3rd September.

Additionally, the church will be participating in ***Heritage Week 2023*** and a talk will be given in the church on the afternoon of Sunday 13th August.

The themes of these events will be:

Sunday 13th August (2:30pm to 4:00pm)

The Windows and Memorials of St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church - A Heritage Week talk on some of the people connected with a selection of the memorials in the church.

Sunday 20th August *Meet the Ancestors* -

A walk to and around the area near Christ Church in which the meeting houses of two of our ancestor congregations (New Row and Cook Street) were located.

Sunday 3rd September *A Trip on the Tram* -

A short Luas journey to Ranelagh followed by a walk around the area of Lower Rathmines.

All Welcome

Rory Delany



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.

Oscailt is Published by the
Dublin Unitarian Church
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Unsolicited articles, news items, letters, poems, etc are always welcome, however there can be no guarantee of publication. Copy should be sent by e-mail or at least typed, photographs should be 300dpi.

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Front Cover:

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Membership of this Congregation *IBC*



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 man's ears to open up with the 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 throwing 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 probably 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 unusual 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 debunkings at 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 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 rich 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

21st May 2023

On not meeting Michael Viney

I first came across Michael Viney's column, *Another Life*, in Saturday's Irish Times in the late 1970s. Here was a man who had left his comfortable job and moved with his family to set up home on an acre of land in the west of Ireland. He was going to write about eking out a living there, a pioneer of self-sufficiency. Saturdays from then on had me turning swiftly to his column to read about his latest forays into nature, each column accompanied by his own drawing. I lingered over his every word. I wanted to meet him, I wanted to meet Ethna, his wife, I wanted to meet Bainin, the Connemara pony, their daughter, Michele, the hens, the geese, taste their home-made wine. I wanted to go to the beach with him at low tide and set the fishing bait and feel that "salty breath of the west". I was in love with the whole set up.

One summer in the late 1970s while holidaying in Co. Mayo, it occurred to me that the townland where the Viney's lived was only a short drive from where we were staying. Could it be possible that I could get to meet him? Hadn't he always said in his column that if any of his readers were in the neighbourhood, then they should call in. It took me a while to persuade my three holiday companions that Michael Viney welcomes unannounced visitors. But persuaded them I did, and before long we were knocking on the door of the Viney cottage, directed there by smiling local farmers.

Ethna Viney opened the door, and if she was surprised to find four eager Dubliners, one of them starstruck, on her doorstep, she didn't show it. "Come in," she said. And we did. My memory is of a piano in the hall with a saddle resting on it. Shells on every windowsill, hundreds of them, beach combing bric-a-brac, jars of preserves, wine fermenting in demijohns, a stone floor, a large fire in the living room, and Ethna's typewriter on a table in front of it.

"Michael is away on an island trip," she said, "but you are welcome to explore the garden if you like." She gestured towards the window to the acre outside which stretched in a narrow strip, a green oasis in a Mayo landscape, the sea blue on the horizon. Swallows



A place of worship since 1717

UNITARIAN CHURCH

Prince's Street, Cork.

Registered Charity Number 0000246

Service: Sundays at 11a.m.

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Further information from 087-9539998

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Secretary : Colm Noonan : e-mail : colm.noonan@gmail.com

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 2nd Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at 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



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for August 2023

30 th 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	Malachy Hevehan, Jane Nolan, Grainne Carty
<hr/>	
6 th August	<i>Can we trust the New Testament ?</i>
Service	Dr. Martin Pulbrook
Reader	Janet Mulroy
Flowers	Lorenzo Casella
Welcomers	Lorenzo Casella, Grainne Carty
Coffee	Sean Fontana, Paula Mills, Frank Kelly
<hr/>	
13 th August	<i>A screen of Truth</i>
Service	Rev. Bridget Spain
Reader	Andy Pollak
Flowers	Emer O'Reilly
Welcomers	Daphne Dunkin, Doireann Ní Bhriain
Coffee	Dorene Grocock, Chris Quinn, Janet Mulroy
<hr/>	
20 th August	<i>The early Christian Church</i>
Service	Rev. Bridget Spain
Reader	Kevin O'Hara
Flowers	Andrew Connolly Crangle
Welcomers	Jennifer Flegg, Charlie Kinch
Coffee	Andrew C. Crangle, Maeve Edwards, Lorraine Doyle
<hr/>	
27 th August	<i>The Purpose of Life</i>
Service	Rev. Bridget Spain
Reader	Jennifer Flegg
Flowers	Mary O'Brien
Welcomers	Paula Mills, Lorraine Doyle
Coffee	Michael Robinson, Maire Bacon, Peter White

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.
On our WebCam, click and connect at 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.

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Treasurer: Rory Delany: 087-2217414,

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Musical Director: Josh Johnston :- 086 892 0602

Caretaker: Kevin Robinson

Telephone: 4752781

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

flitted low over the fuchsia hedges. Suddenly, it came to me with a jolt that we were disturbing her peaceful afternoon. She was writing and we were intruding on her time. We thanked her for her graceful hospitality, and said yes, we would love to walk through the acre, but would leave her to her work.

As the years passed, I still turned every Saturday to Michael Viney's column, travelled with him to the bog, felt the mist roll down from Mweelrea, and watched the furze turn yellow in the springtime. I grew older and wiser.

Each time I thought of my youthful arrival at his door, I'd feel a burn of embarrassment that anyone would have the nerve to just turn up on a doorstep unannounced, with three friends in tow. I took out my pen and paper and wrote to Michael and Ethna Viney to apologise for my intrusion into their home that summer afternoon all those years ago. And typical of the Viney's, they wrote back, thanking me for my letter and dismissing my intrusion as nothing.

I never did get to meet Michael Viney, but he has been a constant in my life, reminding me every Saturday of the beauty of our world and how we must care for it.

Goodbye Michael Viney. You have gladdened my heart for many years. May you now rest in peace.

Maeve Edwards



A Fresh Approach to Christianity

Modern Unitarianism developed from the Reformation. At the Reformation scripture was declared to be the ultimate source of authority for Christian faith. When the Bible became accessible for ordinary people and when they read the Bible they realised that much of what had been part of Christian religious practice was not found in scripture. This is particularly true of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine of Trinity has been part of church teachings since the fourth century; yet nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus refer to the God as Trinity. At the Reformation the question for Christians was could and should **mere** human reason be allowed overturn almost two thousand years of Church tradition and teaching? Our Unitarian ancestors followed the radical path to reject the Doctrine of Trinity. The decision made them an illegal church; this remained the case until 1818.

The Christian Church has always been fixated on dogma. Church leaders debate unimportant points of theology; while ignoring the very unambiguous teaching of Jesus. The Reformation made scripture the ultimate authority in the Christian church. The Enlightenment brought unique challenges to the place of scripture in Christianity.

In addition to highlighting the challenges of a book that has been translated from different languages; science brought into question things such as the basis for miracles. Can we believe that uniquely two thousand years ago Jesus could suspend the laws of physics?

In the early years of the nineteenth century two American Unitarians both of whom had a deep knowledge of scripture addressed some of these issues. In 1819 the former President of the United States Thomas Jefferson created what is called “The Jefferson Bible”. Jefferson merged the gospels into one single account of the life and teaching of Jesus and **removed all references** to miracles from his book. I disagree with Jefferson’s solution.

In that same year at the instillation of a minister called Jared Sparks to a church in Baltimore. William Ellery Channing delivered an address called

“Unitarian Christianity”. In it Channing defends the Unitarian approach to interpreting Christian Scripture. *The address is available on line and is well worth reading.*

Channing makes some important points about the Bible. He says that not all parts of scripture are of equal importance. He says that the important things Jesus taught us are clear they are beyond doubt. They are too plain to be mistaken. Jesus said “love one another” these words are clear there is no room for qualification. But when we come to argue about points of theology we ignore this clear instruction to love one another.

There are other parts of scripture that are more vague. Channing wrote **“God’s wisdom is a pledge, that whatever is necessary for US is revealed too plainly to be mistaken, and too consistently to be questioned by a sound and upright mind”**

Channing’s uses capitals for that US “whatever is necessary for US.” this signifies that he believes that at different times the Bible will reveal different insights for humanity. These new insights will always be mediated through the commandment that we love one another. I believe that Christians are encouraged to bring a creative approach to those parts of the Bible that appear vague or problematic.

Unitarians question more than just the Doctrine of Trinity. We question the physical resurrection of Jesus and the concept of salvation. Did Jesus need to die painfully because of human sinfulness? And of course we question miracles.

I don’t believe that there is value in a religion based on a dead body that was somehow brought back to life two thousand years ago and then just disappeared. I can’t believe in a God that needed the painful death of his son so that God could forgive human nature. I uphold the laws of physics.

Jesus was a teller of stories. When westerners hear a story they ask “did this really happen” in eastern traditions listeners ask “what does the story mean?” To find meaning in the Bible stories I must ask what meaning the stories mean for me?

What follows is the result of my musings on some of the stories of Jesus. Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist who told his followers to “repent” the word “repent” is also translated as “look at the world in a completely different way”. The Gospels invite us to see the world in a totally different way.

The way of the world is that self interest is our guide in how we live. Christianity tells us to think differently; we have a duty to consider to care for others.

Jesus told us not to hoard our wealth- sell what you have and give it to the poor. In this different way of seeing the world; giving away wealth will enrich rather than impoverish us! Repent - look at the world differently!

The story of the resurrection is the easiest story to re-interpret without the need for a miracle. The natural cycle of time is the story of life, growth death and then resurrection; it is repeated every year. Just now particularly among the dead leaves we see new life growing. There are a few crocuses blooming in my garden! Even in the depths of winter mahonia and daphne bloom. Covid will not delay springtime.

Every life has its own cycles of births, growth, deaths recovery and new life. This is the fabric of life- but sometimes we focus only on one part of this great cycle of life.

What about miracles? Do we follow Thomas Jefferson and just ignore them? Accounts of miracles said to have taken place two thousand years are of no value unless we can find meaning from them for our lives. If the deaf blind and lame were cured two thousand years ago- that was good news for the people who were cured. Should we pray for a miracle or go to the opticians or the hearing clinic? What if the stories are not about curing actual physical illnesses?

There are many people who have perfect hearing but who hear only what they want to hear. There are many who are totally deaf to the scientific facts of global warming. On the global stage in the United States about half of 150 million voters hear the voice of a Patriotic leader who claims to be the victim of a conspiracy. The other half hear a failed politician

who should know that his time is past. Most of those voters need neither hearing aids or glasses but each side **is** deaf and blind to the opinion of others.

We are told that Jesus with a small number of loaves and fishes - fed thousands of people. Which would constitute a greater miracle that Jesus managed to increase the amount of food available or that having listened to Jesus that the crowd shared the food that they had brought with them?

What of the concept of redemption? Did my sins necessitate the death of Jesus? I hope not! In the introduction to his book "Luminaries" Rowan Williams writes of a different concept of redemption. In his book William's invites the reader to think of redemption as the ability to tell our story differently. Is life as Shakespeare put it nothing more than " a tale told by a fool full of noise and fury signifying nothing." Or is life as infinitely precious and beautiful? Does my life have purpose?

According to Williams the stories of Jesus allow us to find the beauty and purpose in life. This is a version of redemption I can happily live with.

This church has freedom in our spiritual search. We are privileged that we can dip into other spiritualities. However we should remember that the Christian faith is an exceptionally rich source of spiritual nourishment and we have the freedom to bring fresh insight to its richness.

Rev. Bridget Spain

Dublin 10th Jan 2020

Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for June 2023.

Where the Crawdads Sing

by Delia Owens

It is 1969 , the body of a man is found in the mud swamp at the foot of a dis-used fire tower in Barkley Cove, North Carolina. It is that of local man Chase Andrews, football hero and son of a prominent businessman and members of the town, he's also a philanderer and local boyo. There are no footprints around the body, no fingerprints in the tower which alerts the sheriff to foul play. Did he fall or was he the victim of a more serious crime.

His mother thinks he was murdered because when his belongings are returned there is one item missing, a shell necklace which he always wore and was wearing that night. The necklace was made and given to him by 'the Marsh Girl', Kaya Clarke whom Chase had a recent relationship with. Kaya is the prime suspect now in a murder enquiry , she's arrested and incarcerated in the local jail to await trial. A local Lawyer, Mr. Milton takes on her case pro bono as he has known Kaya since she was a child and feels a certain amount of guilt because of the way she was treated and seen by the townspeople.

The story skips back and forth between 1969 /70 as the sheriff's investigation gets underway and back to when Kaya was a child of six, living on the Marsh with her family. Kaya's mother is the first to leave Kaya, she can no longer endure the domestic violence meted out by her alcoholic husband and Kaya sees her go down the track, thinking she will return some day.

Her two older sisters and older brother also make their escape but it is her brother Jody's leaving that crushes Kaya, he was her friend and mentor, teaching her how to drive the skiff on the marsh, how to hide from truant officers, how to avoid her father's blows. She lives with her father peacefully for a time, he introduces her to local shopkeeper/gas station owner 'Jumpin' and his wife Mabel, they live in Colour town on the edge of the marsh. Her father too disappears on a drunken binge. Kaya is now totally alone at the age of seven trying to survive in a very hostile environment which is described wonderfully by the author who is a conservationist and zoologist. Most of our readers did question if this was credible a child of seven living alone, no money, support, slipping under the radar of everyone? But the author gives Kaya key people who help her, Jumpin and Mabel buy the mussels she picks and help guide her through her young life. She also befriends brother Jody's friend Tate , son of a local shrimper, and keen lover of the marsh. Kaya and Tate build a friendship in their teens ,bonding over their love of the marsh. Kaya collects shells, feathers, plant leaves but cannot read as she only went to

school for one day but she is a talented drawer and painter as was her mother and she draws and paints her collection. Tate teaches Kaya to read and write thus opening up a whole new world to her. Their relationship develops romantically only to be ended by Tate going to the University in Chapel Hill to study biology. He says he will return to Kaya but he breaks this promise as he realises that Kaya will never leave the marsh. Kaya is again abandoned and rejected. The story could have descended into a coming of age romance cliché where the heroine becomes a superhero of sorts fending for herself against all the odds and prejudices of society, which she does, but underneath the stoicism and rejection of society Kaya yearns for human connection and to end her loneliness, to have family again, but thinks this will never happen so she turns to the marsh for solace. "Kaya laid her hand upon the breathing wet earth and the marsh became her mother".

Also as the story skips back and forth to 1969 we are reminded that Kaya is up for murder and may not be so squeaky clean as we think.

Kaya meets the alleged murder victim Chase at Jumpin's. He invites her for a picnic. Kaya is a vulnerable lonely nineteen year old and naïve in the ways of relationships and agrees to meet. They have a picnic and Chase finds a rare scallop shell, Kaya subsequently makes Chase a choker with the shell and he wears it constantly from then on. They embark on a relationship which eventually becomes sexual, Chase's ultimate goal, and after a few years there is even talk of marriage and Kaya thinks final acceptance into society. While Kaya is still involved with Chase, Tate returns to Barkley Cove as a Research Biologist. He still loves Kaya and wants to apologise to her but after firstly a very hostile encounter Kaya finally accepts it and invites Tate into her shack where he sees the work Kaya has done over the years on the flora and fauna of the marsh and persuades her to let him send some of it to publishers to see if there is book in them, which of course there is thus giving Kaya a new way of earning a living and being independent.

Kaya discovers that Chase has been lying to her all along as she sees an announcement in the paper that he is engaged to be married to one of the local girls. She finishes the relationship. They come across each other some months later on the marsh and Chase sexually assaults and attacks Kaya, she manages to escape but is seen by two local fishermen threatening to kill Chase if he ever came near her again. Kaya realises from her observations of nature that Chase will not leave her alone and will want the last blow.

There are a lot of back stories included in the book, Jody returns as a grown man having served in the army and he fills Kaya in on family details about how her mother returned to live with her sister, her mental illness and finally her death. They talk about their father's cowardice and

trauma from World War Two and his bitterness at the loss of his family fortune. This all gives the reader an insight as to why the people in Kaya's life did certain things. All is not black and white.

And so, why do people do certain things? Did Kaya kill Chase?

I am going to leave this part of the story mostly untold just as the author does not describe how Chase actually met his death.

There is the missing Necklace, Kaya's alibi, Kaya's motive as a rejected lover, her threat to kill him, some witness statements that are not so credible and others that are cast iron. There's forensic evidence that may not be accurately dated and the defence picks holes in it all as well as playing to the jury with regard to the prejudices meted out by them all in Barkley Cove on Kaya, the infamous 'Marsh Girl'.

The book club did agree that it was an entertaining read, perhaps more suited to a young adult audience as there was a lot of virtue signalling with the themes such as class, social exclusion, racism, identity, feminism, misogyny etc.

Perhaps a good read for the holidays!

Alison Claffey

Pictures on the front and back cover are
from Moisie's garden party.

Moisie opened her wonderful garden
to us on Saturday 24th June 2023.

Moisie raised €620 for the New Lighting.

Membership of this Congregation.

Membership of this Congregation is open to anyone over the age of 16 who has been attending the Church for about a year and who has made themselves familiar with the religious outlook and ethos of the Church. Anyone interested in becoming a Member should be willing to make a commitment to participate in the life of the Congregation and, where possible, to provide support towards the financial costs of running the Congregation and maintaining the Church premises.

Applications for Membership can be made by letter or email to the Secretary of the Managing Committee. An applicant will become a Member of the Congregation from the date of the approval of their application.

An annual Membership Sunday service is traditionally held in the church in Autumn. A ceremony to welcome new Members is held at this service and anyone who has become a Member during the preceding year will be invited to sign the Membership Book as part of the ceremony.

The Congregation is a democratic organisation and it is open to any Member who has completed a year of Membership to enrol as a Voting Member for the coming year. Voting Members are entitled to propose and vote upon motions at the Congregation's Annual General Meeting and to participate in the annual election of a Managing Committee to run the Congregation's affairs. Voting members are also entitled to participate in the process of selecting a new Minister.



Saturday 24th June 2023

