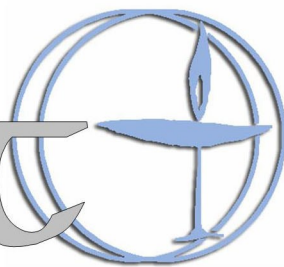


# Oscailt



August 2024

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.20 Nº 8







**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:** Window in the entrance hall, in memory of Travers R.Blackley  
(photo P.Spain)

## **CONTENTS**

### **A BIT OF BUDDHISM IS GOOD FOR ME**

*Andy Pollak* 2

### **The secret of living well and longer**

7

### **God our Father**

*Rev.Bridget Spain* 8

### **KINDNESS**

13

### **Book Review**

14

### **Harvest Thanksgiving**

16



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.

## A BIT OF BUDDHISM IS GOOD FOR ME

Like many people, I suffer from anxiety and mild depression. Occasionally these conditions deepen. That has been happening to me, off and on, in recent months. This is nothing new: while researching this address I came across a similar address I gave in this church 26 years ago.

Then I talked about a helpful book called ‘Care of the Soul’ by an American psychologist called Thomas Moore. This time I am going to reference this book: ‘Life with Full Attention’ by a London-based Buddhist teacher and poet called Maitreyabandhu. I have read this book five times over the past 10 years, so it must be having some influence on me.

Like many people, I have a problem with lack of self-esteem. I compare myself with others; I put myself down; I become a bit overwhelmed sometimes with negative thoughts. I call this my ‘down the plughole’ mood; just about everything can be dragged into it. Negative states of mind are like lobster pots – they are easy to get into but difficult to get out of.

Another way of putting this is to use the Buddhist concept of the ‘second dart’ or the ‘second arrow’. We can hypnotise ourselves into painful states of mind. When we say to ourselves ‘I’m feeling overwhelmed’ or ‘I’m about to relapse into depression’, we shoot ourselves with the second arrow - we shoot ourselves with a big dose of fear and dread. We get locked into a negative feedback loop between painful feelings and painful thoughts.

One way I try to combat my anxiety is through Buddhist meditation, which I try to do every morning (and twice a week with a group in the Dublin Buddhist Centre). Buddhist meditation emphasises that the anxious thoughts we experience are just that: thoughts, which will pass, not facts. Indeed, the facts will show that I have little reason to be depressed. I have had a rather interesting and productive life: I have lived in five countries in several continents, although I have always loved Ireland above any other place on earth; I have been reasonably successful in my chosen profession of journalism; I have co-written or edited three books; I have worked for peace and cooperation in Northern Ireland; above all, I have been hugely blessed by the love of three marvellous women, my wife Doireann and my daughters Sorcha and Grainne.

So I follow Buddhist (and Christian) teaching to make time for the people and things I love. I try to be a good, caring husband and father; I try to cultivate warm friendships; I try to walk in the hills and mountains where I am particularly relaxed and happy; I go cycling around Ireland for the same reasons; I take daily physical exercise and take pleasure in the beauties of nature. I try, as much as I can, to help those of my fellow-humans who are less privileged and more unfortunate than me. And usually my times of enjoying and cherishing someone or something – and helping other people – gradually change how I feel about myself.

But I also find regular Buddhist meditation helpful in that it calms my mind more generally. We 21<sup>st</sup> century humans suffer from a dragon's head, a mind that races with thoughts and ideas, arguments and opinions, emails and WhatsApps and 'to do' lists. We have a snake's body: long and thin and underdeveloped. The Buddha, who lived 2,500 years ago, would experience us as being one-sidedly cerebral, with a marked tendency to rationalise, ruminate and abstract. That is certainly the way I am.

So I like to cultivate – through my morning meditation – the first of the Buddha's spheres of mindfulness: mindfulness of the body. Buddhists believe body awareness roots us in direct physical sensations, and, as such, is a vital contribution to avoid being caught up in painful thoughts. I bring my mind into my body by doing a toe to top of the head 'body scan'. I focus on the lower and middle parts of my body and on my breath as I concentrate on those parts. I feel, in particular, my feet, stomach and heart, and the weight of my body on the floor. I focus on my breath passing through my body. This is usually a good antidote for anxiety and tension.

I also try to cultivate the second and third of the Buddha's spheres of mindfulness: mindfulness of feeling (what Buddhists call 'vedana') and mindfulness of mind and heart. I try to focus on beautiful and restful and natural images: my daughters' and granddaughter's faces; the Wicklow hills; the Atlantic Ocean off the Kerry and West Cork coasts. I think of ordinary things: a jar of honey, reading a book, walking along a bog road. Thinking about nature is particularly important here. These 'ordinary' things are made significant by a mind that is calm, alert, inquisitive and un-preoccupied – the kind of consciousness I hope that meditation and mindfulness are helping me to cultivate (not always successfully, I should add).

I try to cultivate appreciation: of beauty and nature and art and music and sport. Maitreyabandu writes: “The spiritual value of the appreciative mode is in its non-utilitarian, non-acquisitive nature. Appreciation is an end in itself. It is its own reward. And as we develop this appreciative mode, we start to become sensitised to how so much of modern life is ugly. We notice how banal the media can be, how unpalatable harsh speech, cynical ideas and snide remarks are. We start to notice that egoism, in all of its myriad guises, is not very productive – we see how uncreative it is, how coarse and predictable. True appreciation is a letting-go of self, a letting-go of egoism. When we are absorbed in the appreciative awareness of a wide blue sky, or a tree, or a poem, or a songbird we forget ourselves and, by doing so, we transcend ourselves.”

The arts can play an important role here. The pleasure one gets from art is not based in egotistic desire. We can read a poem, listen to a piece of music or look at a painting and feel uplifted. We can come away from watching *King Lear* or *The Cherry Orchard* and feel we have gained a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. This is what Seamus Heaney calls ‘the redress of poetry’: that the arts can give us back our life, purified and absolved by the imaginative vision of the artist.

The Buddha communicated the essence of spiritual life, the culminating insight of life with full attention, in the words: “In the seen, only the seen; in the heard, only the heard.” “This is experience with nothing left over, with nothing of ‘me’ added on”, writes Maitreyabandu. It is pure, selfless appreciation. When we see things in this way – without describing, grasping or referring everything back to me, me, me – we see with what Buddhists call *vidya*. And when we see with *vidya*, the world begins to shine. We look at a building, a mop bucket or a bramble hedge, and there seems to be something *more*, it seems alive in a way we can’t pin down. The life in the world ‘out there’ seems connected to the life ‘in here’ – both seem more vivid, and at the same time more mysterious. The chasm between the world and the self has begun to disappear.”

Buddhism teaches that freedom is essentially freedom from self. One could say that ‘letting go of the prison of self’ is the goal of Buddhism. I find that a very attractive idea. I do Buddhist meditation to free myself from the negativity of my racing mind and its sometimes toxic thoughts, to find some calm and serenity in this speedy and self-obsessed and often frightening world.

However there is far more to Buddhism than this psychological sanctuary. Maitreyabandu writes: “In the early stages of spiritual life, we are likely to be motivated by the need for personal happiness and freedom from pain. We will see mindfulness as a way of becoming happier in our skin and more at home in our world. Practising mindfulness will help us to achieve this, so long as we learn carefully and practice regularly.

“But our motivations can change. We might discover that our quest for personal happiness has become limiting and, after a certain point, self-defeating. We might start to feel motivated more by the sufferings of other people rather than by our own. We might even start to realise that the only way to true happiness is to transcend self altogether. This is the transcendental orientation of Buddhism. A Buddhist approach to mindfulness takes into account a psychological orientation but will always guide us towards a transcendental one.

Buddhism is emphatic in saying that it is only by liberating ourselves from our belief in a separate self – separate from others and from the world – that we will finally be happy.”

I am not ready for this move beyond the psychological and towards the transcendental. I accept the central Buddhist teaching that all things are impermanent, and that this precious life has to be lived now, the world has to be fully appreciated now, that life must be lived with as full an attention as possible now because it will not last. However I find it hard to get my head around the other central Buddhist concept that a fixed and really existing self is a delusion, which will disappear when all attachments are gotten rid of – including attachment to dearly loved ones – and Enlightenment is achieved. Maybe I never will be a complete convert. Maybe Buddhist teaching about ‘spiritual death’ and ‘spiritual rebirth’ all sounds too much like being ‘born again’ – which my early upbringing in evangelical Protestant Northern Ireland turned me against.

However there are other important things even an agnostic like me can learn from Buddhism. For example, generosity is something I try to cultivate. The Buddha says that if you are generous, the whole of the spiritual life is open to you. You can have many faults and shortcomings, but if you are generous, many things are possible. I find generosity is a practical way of improving my self-esteem. When I feel bad about myself, I become self-absorbed. Self-absorption is

one of the major symptoms of depression. A simple antidote to this painful self-preoccupation is generosity. Generosity is something one can practice in any state of mind; you don't have to be in a good mood. I believe that if I give to other people – even in small ways – I often find a sense of inner fullness and calm. Generosity creates positive relationships with others, which is vital to our happiness.

Maitreyabandu writes: “Your relationship with other people is the key to happiness. If you can listen to people, give to them, be kind to them, you will yourself become happier. You will be freed from corrosive self-absorption and you will avoid the danger of spiritualised selfishness. All genuine spiritual practice is concerned with helping others. When we forgive people, when we put ourselves out for them, when we overcome our irritations and resentments concerning them, we transcend ourselves. Self-transcendence is the goal of Buddhism.”

One mantra I use in my meditation practice sums up my attitude to life and action, and I suppose makes me a bit of a Buddhist. It goes like this:

*With deeds of loving kindness, I purify my body.*

*With open-handed generosity, I purify my body.*

*With stillness, simplicity and contentment, I purify my body.*

*With truthful communication, I purify my speech.*

*With mindfulness, clear and radiant, I purify my mind.*

*With gratitude, I purify my heart.*

*Andy Pollak*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

9 June 2024





The secret of living well and longer  
Eat half,  
Walk double,  
Laugh triple,  
Love without measure.

Tibetan proverb

# God our Father

In this address I want to look at how images of God and beliefs about God have changed over time. These changes happen so gradually that it is only in hindsight that it is possible to discern the new pattern. The image of God as a father figure comes from the Christian tradition. I believe that there is a new image of God beginning to emerge. This address uses very large brush strokes as it moves through thousands of years of history.

As a general rule Unitarians are reluctant to articulate their beliefs about God. Any statement a Unitarian makes about God will usually come with some form of caveat. In Monotheistic religions there are some points of consensus about what is meant when we say the word God. These are the general presumptions that underlie beliefs about God.

*God is the creator of the Universe pre - existing in all times.*

*God intervenes in the affairs of humanity in a personal way.*

*There is a relationship between God and humanity.*

*Over time God has revealed himself to humanity to inform us  
how we should live.*

*When we die God will judge us and punish or reward us in an  
after life.*

In Monotheistic religions the history of God's intervention in the world is to be found firstly in the Jewish Scriptures. Depending on the faith perspective; further revelations about God are found in the New Testament and the Qura'n. Despite that convoluted dogma of Trinity; there is One God.

The Jewish scriptures are the history of one Nation; they are also a record of how that Nation's ideas concerning God developed over time. Much of the Jewish Scriptures are devoted to the laws that govern Jewish religious practice how to pray and fast, rules concerning purity, rituals, dietary laws. It is said that the Jewish faith has a rule for every day of the year. So Jews are expected to fulfil about 365 different rules. The Laws of Moses are a blueprint for how Jews



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## **UNITARIAN CHURCH CORK**

Registered Charity Number 0000246

**Due to the fire in the church in January 2024**

**The service will be broadcast on  
Facebook until further notice.**

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

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

e-mail:- osullmike@gmail.com Mobile 087-9539998

Further information from 087-9539998

**Treasurer :** Brian Cluer e-mail: bmcleur@gmail.com

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

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

## **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 August 2024**

4<sup>th</sup> August      *God as Mentor*  
Service      Pamela McCarthy  
Reader      Janet Mulroy  
Flowers      Andrew Connolly Crangle  
Welcomer      Janet Mulroy      Gráinne Carty  
Coffee      Peter Fontana, Therese Fontana, Sean Fontana

---

11<sup>th</sup> August      *The Atheist Delusion .*  
Service      Tony Brady  
Reader      Emer O'Reilly  
Flowers      Emer O'Reilly  
Welcomer      Frank Tracy      Emer O'Reilly  
Coffee      Gavin O'Duffy, Janet Mulroy, Gráinne Carty

---

18<sup>th</sup> August      *God's Truth.*  
Service      Rev.Bridget Spain  
Reader      Jennifer Flegg  
Flowers      Paula Mills  
Welcomer      Denise Dunne      Gráinne Cart  
Coffee      Lorraine Doyle, Paula Mills, Alison Claffey

---

25<sup>th</sup> August      *Who's Justice?*  
Service      Shari McDaid  
Reader      Peter White  
Flowers      Máire Bacon  
Welcomer      Tony Brady      Janet Mulroy  
Coffee      Máire Bacon, Peter White, Colette Douglas

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:-** Madam Chairperson: Denise Dunne;  
Vice Chairman: Dennis Aylmer; Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;  
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, e-mail: [roryjdelany@hotmail.com](mailto:roryjdelany@hotmail.com)

Musical Director: Josh Johnston :- 086 892 0602

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

should live in order to be in “right relationship with God”. In so far as Jews observe the Mosaic Law they are in right relationship with God. Fulfilling the law is more important than belief; in return God will prosper the Jewish people. This is the covenant between God and God’s people.

In ancient Judaism God’s dwelling was in the Temple in Jerusalem. Jews went to the Temple to perform their religious duties. The most sacred part of the Temple was the holy of holies. Only the High Priest could enter it and then only at certain times. This God of the Jews was a jealous, vengeful God.

In early Judaism there was no concept of life after death; the Jewish scriptures are silent about reward or punishment in the next life. We are all familiar with the story of Job. Job loses his family, his wealth and his health. Having once been favoured by God Job now sits on a dung heap picking his sores. Job’s friends arrive to comfort him. Now had Job lived in Ireland they would have said something along the lines “things will get better and sure God is Good”. Not so in ancient Judea the friends ask him, how he - Job - has offended against God. In their view Job or his immediate family must have broken the law. When the book of Job was written, there was no concept that Job was simply going through a bad run of luck; and that in the next life he can be assured that justice will prevail. In ancient Judaism God’s justice was immediate.

God has promised the land to his people - that was their covenant. When the land of Judea was invaded and the Jews taken into slavery; it was believed that the nation had not kept faith with God. This was the age of the great Prophets Isaiah Jeremiah and so on. In their writings the Prophets tell the Jews that it was their failure to keep the Laws of Moses that was the cause of the disaster. Academics refer to this the “prophetic view of the world”. In this “prophetic view of the world” if Jews are in right relationship with God; prosperity for the country and the individual is assured.

In time the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they rebuilt the Temple; a priest-hood was established. God it seemed was once more on side; the covenant was re-established. Then in 63 BCE

Jerusalem was defeated by Rome; this initiated a time of extraordinary civil unrest and soul searching within the Jewish nation. Within 130 years of Roman domination, Jerusalem was destroyed, the Temple removed stone by stone and the Jewish Nation dispersed from their country. Jesus was born into this political upheaval and soul searching. It was a time of religious questioning a time of Messiahs. There were many who claimed to be the Messiah. In the Book “Zealot” by Reza Khan three generations of one family were executed at different times because of their claims to be the Messiah.

From its earliest days Christians have used the Jewish Scriptures for particular purposes. At a time when historic roots were valued Christians claimed the Jewish Scriptures as their own in order to give them a history. Christians interpreted the Jewish scriptures to validate the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. From a huge volume of writings Christians select *appropriate parts* of the scriptures to substantiate the claim. Quotations are taken out of context and without references to the remaining texts. Christians excuse themselves from obedience to large tracts of these Scriptures. Christians pick the parts that suit them. Christians don’t stone adulterers, we wear clothes made from polyester/cotton mix. We don’t offer animal sacrifices.

Notwithstanding this the teachings attributed to Jesus of Nazareth have shaped and influenced western religion for two millennia. But in the teachings attributed to Jesus there is nothing very original. Five hundred years before Jesus, Confucius wrote down the golden rule “what you do not wish for yourself; do not do to others”. The Jewish Rabbi Hillel summed up the law of Moses as “do not do to others what is hateful to you”. Where the teaching of Jesus is revolutionary is that Jesus preached a new vision of God a new way to approach God.

In the ancient Jewish image of God there is a chasm between God and humanity. God is a powerful God, a jealous God, a god who is to be approached in fear. This God is a God of Laws the keeper of scores.

The new message of Jesus is that the spirit of how we approach religious practice is more important than the rules. Religious practice is not seeing what we can get away with. Jesus tells us that Compassion, love and charity should always supersede the rules. In the story



of the Good Samaritan, the priest, who passed by the injured man, had good reason to walk by on the other side - contact with blood would have made the priest ritually impure. While in a state of ritual impurity he could not fulfil his priestly duties. Jesus said forget the rules - the only yardstick you use to judge is compassion; compassion takes precedence over rules.

In ancient Judea the Priest offered sacrifices on behalf of the people. Jesus told his followers to speak to God, calling god father. **Now** the relationship between humanity and God has become personal and intimate. The prayer that Jesus taught has been used by Christians for two thousand years; it unites all Christians. It causes some Unitarians a deal of soul searching. Some disagree with the paternalistic tone of the prayer; there many feminised versions of it on line. My personal disagreement with the Christian approach to God as “father” is that it has embedded in us a belief that God as superman. Images of God as being male, puts 50% of the population at a disadvantage. This makes us forget that God is genderless. Through the human story; humans have always used male and female images for their gods.

The teaching of Jesus made God more accessible to humanity. We address God directly as a child would a loving father. Christianity also taught us that humans are by nature sinners; sinners in need of redemption.

I believe that we are experiencing a move away from this concept of humans as sinners in need of redemption. There is a change becoming discernable. Humanity is beginning to see God being even closer than a loving adopted father; we are beginning to think of God as being within us.

It is within memory that a stillborn child was excluded from their community. These babies were spirited away and buried in the dark away from the rest of the community; their very existence almost denied. This was because they were not baptised. We no longer regard the un-baptised as sinners. Human parents do not believe their child is full of sin. We are not hopeless sinners, but chips of the Divine although our divinity is somewhat dented.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that the mistake we made is that we saw Jesus as being “exclusively divine” that we fail to really see

the divinity within every person and within ourselves. He said that human beings are “god in ruins”. The very ancient Hindu tradition says that within each person there is a spark of the Divine.

When we live with compassion that spark shines more brightly. When we fail to live or to be the best humans we can be, that light becomes more and more dim. It is the work of spiritual seekers to follow the teachings of all traditions to let their light shine.

I believe that we are moving to a different concept of the divine. Some call this “new consciousness” as with all change the new reality will be revealed over time and will only be seen in retrospect. In the meantime we seek our path. We explore, we examine, we trust our instinct to find our truth. If we have compassion as our guide we will not lose the right path.

*Rev. Bridget Spain*  
Minister Emerita

Dublin 13<sup>th</sup> September 2015

# KINDNESS

by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window for ever.

Before you know the tender gravity of kindness,  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans  
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,  
only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

Read on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2024 by Andy Pollak, at the service by Rev. Will Humphrey

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for June 2024.**

**Circe**  
*by Madeline Miller*

Madeline Miller is an American author and teacher of Latin, Greek and Shakespeare. She earned her BA and MA in Classics so she knows her subject matter when re-imagining the source story of Circe, a minor Greek Goddess who appears in Homer's *Odyssey*. In *Mythology* Circe is depicted as the archetype femme fatale, a notorious sorceress and witch with powers to change humans into animals. Miller weaves a story told from Circe's point of view which turns out to be her own epic voyage of discovery.

This synopsis is taken from Madeline Miller's website on Circe  
<https://madeline-miller.com>

*In the house of Helios, god of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe is a strange child, not powerful like her father, nor viciously alluring like her mother. Turning to the world of mortals for companionship, she discovers that she does possess power, the power to transform rivals into monsters and menace the gods themselves. Threatened, Zeus banishes her to a deserted island where she hones her occult craft, tames wild beasts and crosses paths with many of the most famous figures in all of mythology including the Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus, the murderous Medea and of course wily Odysseus.*

*But there is danger too for a woman who stands alone and Circe unwittingly draws the wrath of both men and gods ultimately finding herself pitted against one of the most terrifying and vengeful of the Olympians. To protect what she loves most Circe must summon all her strength and choose once and for all whether she belongs with the gods she is born from or the mortals she has come to love.*

This is a book about a woman who is on her own Odyssey or journey of self discovery. Although Circe is a goddess she embodies some of the most human of traits such as vengefulness, guilt, jealousy but also compassion and love. This makes her character very relateable and she is very well drawn. The reader is caught up in the episodes of her life from her isolation and otherness as a young naïve nymph in her fathers realm to her exile and abandonment on the island of Aiaia where she endures loneliness and further isolation. Her longing for connection and love leaves her vulnerable to outside forces which visit her on her island. But Circe builds up resilience and defences against the outside world and in this narrative we see why she changes some of these 'visitors' into swine, most notably Odysseus' men. Against all the wrongs done to Circe and events she has endured she still has a 'humane' interior and it is this conflict between her power and immortality as a divine being and that of her longing for human connection and belonging to the mortal world even with it's certain finality, that is really Circe's dilemma. Has she got the courage to make the most important transformation of her life, that of herself to become the being she wants to become.

The book club readers enjoyed this book (bar one). We thought the writing and prose was rich and vivid with some wonderful descriptions of nature and the environment of the island and also of the mythical world of the gods/goddesses . You cant help but imagine the scenes being described and the characters involved as it is very sensory, it's almost in technicolour.

In this retelling of Circe's story the author succeeds to captivate and engage those readers familiar and unfamiliar with Greek mythology through her wonderful writing and her knowledge of the source materials of the classics. There has been criticism from some classical 'purists' as she has taken some liberties with the original texts. But I'd say that it is a testament to the endurance of these stories from 3,000 years ago that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can still draw on them for inspiration and the telling of 'universal truths'.

The book club readers would recommend this book.

*Alison Claffey*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

## **A different kind of Harvest Thanksgiving**

A harvest thanksgiving service is probably a favorite service, particularly in Protestant Denominations. Harvest Thanksgiving was once a staple of this congregation. However, we felt we were being dishonest, because we did not grow any of the produce used to decorate the building. Every item used to be bought in Smithfield Market! Then for many years we used Membership Sunday as an opportunity to sing the traditional Harvest Hymns.

### **Something different**

Christian Aid works to relieve poverty and suffering in all parts of the world. Christian Aid gave me a different idea for how we could show our gratitude for the Harvest. The idea is to hold a harvest thanksgiving lunch. The congregation would share lunch in the Damer Hall after service. Diners make a donation for the lunch. The funds raised are donated to Christian Aid.

There are advantages to this idea

Sharing food builds a sense of community.

We enjoy a social occasion.

We are reminded of how fortunate we are to have food and security.

The money raised will be put to good use.

What is needed.

Volunteers to cook a lunch dish for 8/10 servings.

Volunteers to provide desserts.

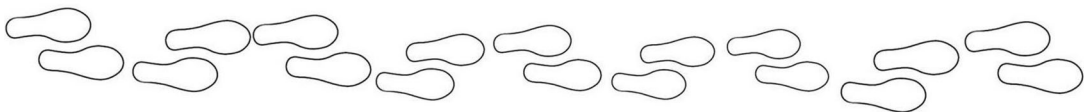
Volunteers to help organise the event and to serve the food.

Volunteers to clean up afterwards.

**When** Sometime in late September/October.

If anyone is willing to become involved in the project please give details to Bridget email [revbspain@gmail.com](mailto:revbspain@gmail.com)





## City Walks Plus

Our customary *Summer Walks* around the city will take place directly after Service on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> of August 2024 and the on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September.

Additionally, the church will again be participating in *Heritage Week* and this year a talk will be given in the church on the afternoon of Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

*The themes of these events are*

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August** *A Nearby Suburb -*

A walk to and around the Camden Street area.

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August** (2:30pm to 4:00pm)

*The Baptismal & Marriage Register*

*of St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church' -*

A Heritage Week talk in the church on some of the baptismal and marriage records contained in the Register.

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September** *A Trip on the Tram -*

A short Luas journey to Dominick Street followed by a walk around the Capel Street area.

**All Welcome**

*Rory Delany*

