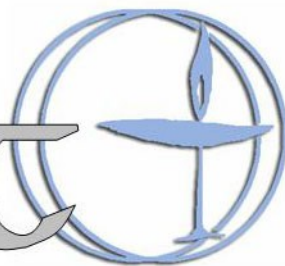


# Oscailt



February 2025

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

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## 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

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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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**Rev. Bridget Spain** (*Minister Emerita*)  
e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Rev. Bill Darlison *Minister Emeritus*.

hellounitarianchurch@gmail.com  
www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

Editor: Paul Spain

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**Front Cover:** A honeybee on a Snowdrop.  
(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 man's ears to open up with the Aramaic 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.

# Vegetarian

Good Morning, my name is Max, I'm 11, I'm from a Unitarian family and I'm a vegetarian.

The reason I'm up here is because my mum brought myself and my sister Poppy on the Unitarian outing to the Mosque. It's important to be open, and when all the talking was finished, we were invited to have food with them. I asked one of the men who had done some of the talking in English which dishes were vegetarian and he pointed them out to me. The food was nice. At the very end when people had started to leave my mum was talking to the same man, apparently he teaches Arabic, and my mum works with language teachers. He said you're the kid that asked about the vegetarian food, are you vegetarian? I said I was and then he asked why. I told him I think it's wrong to eat animals.

Then he started laughing, a lot, and then he said I'm delighted you are vegetarian, that means there's more meat for me. What can you say to an adult that's laughing at you? My mum seemed a bit taken aback by his reaction as well. We said goodbye and thank you for the invitation and left, almost everyone else had left at this stage. My mum tells me, it was an unfortunate example of an adult giving a weird response, that doesn't mean every Muslim would have done the same thing. I said I ought to read something about why it's good to be vegetarian in church, so here I am.

My family went somewhere between vegan and vegetarian, when I was 4. We got 2 pet chickens a little while before that, I don't really remember our garden before chickens. Our first chickens were called Snowball and Maxine, I named Maxine. Chickens are actually very soft and you can pick them up. Most people think chickens are a bit stupid, but when they get to know them they realise they're not.

At the very beginning I was pescatarian and that was my choice. When we were on holiday we went to a turtle sanctuary. The poor turtles had lost legs and hurt themselves badly because fishermen throw their plastic nets away when they're broken and then turtles get trapped in them. If they're not rescued, they die. I decided I didn't want to be part of that, so even though I liked fish, I stopped eating it as well. That was my choice. We didn't really discuss it, but I thought about it, and made the decision myself.

Let's go back to chickens. Maxine and Snowball were joined by 2 rescue chickens. Rescue chickens are chickens that factory farms get rid of because they temporarily stop laying when they moult. There's an animal rescue place that picks them all up and finds homes for them, otherwise they would become pet food. Rescue chickens look terrible at the beginning but eventually they look healthy. Rescue chickens don't go broody, it's been bred out of them, but Maxine was an Araucana chicken, Araucanas lay blue eggs, and she used to go broody. She'd stay in the nesting box for days, even weeks, she wanted babies. Some people do cruel things to chickens when they go broody, but we didn't, we let her do her thing. We had Maxine for a long time, she only died last year. Rescue chickens don't live for years and years so we've had lots of rescue chickens, we give them a nice life, even if it's short. Maxine was really nice to the other chickens, if one of them was unwell, she would stop finding food in the garden and come over and sit with her, sometimes for hours at a time. She showed empathy. Maxine was very chatty, she was always chatting away, not a loud "I'm frightened" noise but a soft gentle chatty noise. Chickens are very inquisitive, if you're in the garden, they come to see what you're doing and if my dad or mum is working in the garden, they are always keen to help. When we let them out in the morning, they charge across the garden to see what's new on the compost heap, and before they go to bed, they come to the kitchen door for a snack before bedtime.

We do house swaps and when people look after the chickens, they frequently comment that the chickens have personalities. We looked after one family's dog, her name was Luna, and they looked after our chickens and they said having a pet chicken was almost like having a pet dog. But you don't have to walk a chicken. I think factory chickens must hate being locked up or squashed in with thousands of other chickens.

I've been to lots of birthday parties where there's chicken nuggets or sausages on offer and it's my choice not to have them on my plate. They treat animals really cruelly. You can get fake chicken nuggets, sausages and burgers, you don't have to kill an animal. I like good food and luckily my family are good at making good vegetarian food, my favourite is Cannelloni.

There are a lot of people in the world, 8 billion, there's not enough space for everyone to eat meat and it's very cruel, so I don't.

*Max Tattersall*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

# The Atheist Delusion

The title of today's address is "The Atheist Delusion" It is intended as an attempted answer to the best-selling book by Richard Dawkins "The God Delusion" published in 2006, in which he argues against the existence of God The main thrust of his argument appears to be based on the deficiencies which he sees in the various religions, and in this respect, we would have to agree with him.

For the most part, and with some exceptions God has had the most unfortunate collection of public relations officers.

If we look upon God as a super-human being somewhere out there we have to say "his interview system for selecting his leadership team is hopelessly defective" That would certainly be an argument for the non-existence of such a CEO.

Dawkins refers to religious texts, such as the Bible and the Quran, which contain morally questionable passages. And he points out how these texts are interpreted to justify actions considered unacceptable to any right-thinking person.

In Deuteronomy we see "In the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes, completely destroy them"

And in the Quran "I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them." It is hard to accept that exhortations like this can appear in any text claiming to be inspired by a God worthy of our belief.

Dawkins highlights easy-to-find examples where religion has been a source of conflict, violence, and division, The Crusades, the Inquisition, even modern terrorism.

And just think of the knots the mainstream Christian churches have gotten themselves into on the issues of the ministry of women and the fundamental rights of L-G-B-T-Q-+ people? In some religious headquarters it seems rationality has moved forward very little since the time of Galileo.

Dawkins also refers to the discrimination and violence inflicted on people who dare to hold different beliefs.

He rightly criticises the indoctrination of children thrust into religious belief systems long before they are capable of independent thought. *All reasonable arguments.*

But his case against the existence of God is much less persuasive. He suggests (rightly) that any being capable of designing the universe would have to be at least as complex as the universe itself and he says this makes the existence of such a being unlikely.

He introduces the concept of the “Ultimate Boeing 747”. He says our trying to explain the complexity of life by invoking a designer only shifts the problem of complexity to the designer. His point is that this designer would need an explanation for its own existence, leading to an infinite regress.

But Dawkin’s argument fails to address the fundamental question of why anything exists at all and especially the existence of beings as complex as ourselves.

It is reasonable to argue against the concept of an external creator but we are faced with an extraordinarily complex interconnected universe.

Our universe has produced intelligent beings capable of asking fundamental questions about existence itself. How can a universe give rise to intelligence unless the underlying basis of the universe is itself intelligent? The fact that we are here asking the question suggests there is something more at play.

A reasonable answer to Dawkins point of view is the proposition that the underlying reality which we refer to as God is present in and through all things. In other words our God would be better described in terms of Pantheism.

In Pantheism God is seen as immanent, in other words the divine is present in all aspects of the universe. But we must go beyond any superficial notion that “Everything is God”, a far too simplistic idea.

Instead we have stop. We have to pay attention. Stopping to pay attention will allow us to really see the world in all its wonder. Then we might understand that what we see with our eyes and hear with our ears is the manifestation of an underlying intelligent reality.

Instead of looking for God “out there” or dismissing the idea of God altogether this mindful way of going about our days will help us notice a constant, direct relationship with a divine essence at the heart of the natural world.

You might ask “What happens then to this personal God with whom we are all so familiar?, the God-out-there to whom we used to address our prayers? Can we pray to a different God whose essence is buried deep beneath the surface of the natural world? The answer is “yes of course we can”.

But a word of caution! We have to remember this: We are finite beings attempting in some flimsy way to express what we feel about the infinite and the eternal, an impossible task. So whatever we say and however we say it, it will be inadequate. Even so as thinking beings we have to try.

So, the God I am trying to describe is not personal in the sense that you are a person and I am a person.

The God of Pantheism is intrapersonal way beyond the closeness of any relationship we could visualise between one person and another however close the two might be.

The God of Pantheism is closer to me and to you than we are to ourselves.

The word personal is a hopelessly inadequate description of the personal relationship between ourselves and God-deeply-immersed-in-the-world.

I am sure Unitarians will not be fans of all the writings of Saint Paul, but he captures this idea of the omnipresence of God in his words issued during a visit to Athens. St Paul says: “In Him we live and move and have our being”.

The interesting thing is that modern science, with its revelations about the interconnectedness and unity of all things, supports this way of looking at the world.

The discoveries in quantum physics, where we hear of particles entangled and influencing each other across vast distances, lends support to a pantheistic understanding of a unified reality.

Pantheism has the capacity to bridge the gap between science and spirituality. It promotes a worldview valuing both scientific knowledge and spiritual experience. This way of looking at things can only enrich our understanding of the universe and our place within it.

Next question: Can you pray to the divine essence manifested in nature? Why not? God is not only beside us, above us, and below us. God is in and through the very atoms of each one of us.



And this way of looking at God-present-in-the-world has ethical implications as well. We will be more inclined towards empathy, kindness, and respect for other people. This ethical way of looking at things can extend to all living creatures and to the environment itself. This view fosters a sense of responsibility and stewardship.

Pantheism encourages us to live in harmony with nature recognising not only the inherent worth and dignity of all persons, an idea with which we are familiar in this church, but the intrinsic value of all forms of life which is such a need in our world today.

Pierre Teilhard De Chardin was a French Jesuit, a scientist, a paleontologist. As you can imagine, his views were met with resistance from the Catholic Church. The Vatican was concerned that these ideas blurred the lines between pantheism and traditional theism, De Chardin says this: "There is neither spirit nor matter in the world. The stuff of the universe is spirit-matter. No other substance but this could have produced the human molecule"

At the end of the day Atheism itself requires a form of faith, believing there is no God. It requires acceptance of the idea that life has no inherent purpose or meaning. But how can that be? The suggestion that the complexity of the universe as we know it is a result of pure chance is very hard to accept, much harder to accept than the idea of God.

The proposition that the existence of intelligent beings such as ourselves is the product of a universe which has no underlying intelligence is absurd, it makes no sense. Surely the evidence all around us points more convincingly to the existence of an underlying intelligence?

Sometimes we are reluctant to use the God word because of all the baggage attached to the word. But in the light of common sense and by simply stopping and really paying attention to the wonder of the world around us isn't it more reasonable to take just one small step in faith and say: "On the balance of probabilities, we believe in God and the God we believe in is closer to us than we are to ourselves"

*Tony Brady*

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

# The Bayno

5 mins walk from here is this impressive building. Built between 1912 and 1915 by The Guinness Family, The Iveagh Trust Playcentre which later became know as the ‘The Bayno’ was built to help alleviate poverty in the area, and to give children the possibility of education and fun. It remained open until 1975 when it was taken over by the CDVEC and it is now the Liberties College of Further Education where I have been blessed to work for the past 30 years. Only last week, a student told me how grateful she is to have found the college as she believes it to be a special place. I believe that it is just THAT because it was built FOR the good.

Within two years of opening, 4,000 children were recorded as having attended the facility, which was open for children aged from 4 to 14 every evening after school. Great camaraderie developed between kids as they could play football in a large playground, learn to dress-make, sing, dance and enjoy other activities like cookery classes and woodwork. My own dad and some of his siblings attended.

In her book *Around the Banks of Pimlico* local historian Mairin Johnson writes about her time at the Bayno. (As an aside, when I interviewed Mairin for a radio documentary I was making on the Iveagh Washhouse which was situated behind the Iveagh market, both also built by the Guinness family, I was chuffed to discover she was one of the women who went on the Contraceptive Train in 1971. One of many remarkable women!) You will see from the following abridged version that the lofty intentions of the providers of the Bayno could often be scuppered.

It was in the 1940s that my pals and I used go to the Bayno and on the way down we would always sing the bayno song ‘tip toe to the bayno, where the kids go for their bun and cocoa , tip toe to the bayno with me’. It was very important to get down there in time or else you mightn’t get in, but getting there too early wasn’t the best plan either , because there was the danger of getting involved in gang warfare and some of the regulars would scrawb or reef you to bits if you looked crooked at them. I think some of them where psychic, because by some unknown means they always knew when opening time was approaching and would start forming the queue. This was the flashpoint when the queue skipping, pushing , shovin, boxing matches and threats started.

*Wait til i get you outside the gate, ye common rossie ye,  
I'll lave ye suckin' yer blood.*

*You and what army?*

*Who do you think yer looking' at cock eye*

Nothing much when Im lookin' at you , gunner eye.

This kind of name calling, hair pulling, kicks in the shin and insults were all the norm and were indulged in by usual few troublemakers who could never keep their hands on themselves. As soon as the doors opened it was like a stampede and god help you if you tripped and fell.

After the announcement of our day's activities, the reason why most of us were there in the first place was performed. This was the distribution of the buns and tin mugs of shell cocoa. Some other children really looked forward to these and the way they wired into the buns showed just how hungry they were. The buns were studded with sultanas and currants which I thought looked like dead flies. Some of the kids brought paper bags and collected buns from those like myself who couldn't stand the fruit. Even half eaten buns were swooped up.

Every year the children in the bayno were treated to a Christmas party. Admittance was by ticket only and were reserved for the regular attenders. One year my school pal Annie Molloy from the Coombe got two tickets and invited me along. I had never been to a party in my life so was quite excited. The world and Garrett Reilly were there and like everyone else I had my own brown paper bag to collect some of the goodies for my mother. Instead of buns and shell cocoa we got lovely bottles of lemonade and skinny bars of Cadburys Chocolate, Jacobs biscuits, balloons, paper hats, streamers, sweets and fizz bags. The goodies were being swiped left right and centre and it was all I could do to hold onto my presents and the biscuits which got all mashed up in the bag. The blinds were pulled down and the Charlie Chaplin film started and we couldn't stop laughing because as well as the films being funny they kept coming out upside down or the projector would break down , small kids were roaring and bawling, fights broke out and no own would sit down. It was a relief when it was over but it WAS great gas all the same and I'll never forget that skinny bar of Cadburys chocolate - it was delicious!

*Lorraine Doyle*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

# The Garden

The title of my address this morning is The Garden. A few years ago, I was asked to write the introduction to a book of photographs, poems and essays about the Irish National War Memorial Gardens. The Gardens are nestled beside the Liffey, the main entrance tucked behind Gael Scoil Inse Chór and the St. John of God School in Islandbridge, Dublin 8. Officially they are part of the Phoenix Park even though they are on the opposite side of the river but there are now plans in place to connect them by a footbridge.

Commemorations of the First World war remain contested in Ireland although less than they used to be. In other jurisdictions, the architecture and social infrastructure of commemoration and the legacy of war is woven into everyday life: Armistice days services, local village monuments to the dead, family military histories and genealogies, parades of veterans and medals. I have never been comfortable with the valorization of military campaigns despite having grandfathers and great grandfathers who fought in wars. This tension in remembering was also found in the attitudes of some local people towards the War Memorial Gardens, calling it ‘Legion Park’, in the decades after it was built, associating it with imperialism and unable, or unwilling, to see beyond given political or cultural frames.

We live in different times now, where the role and sacrifice of Irish soldiers in World War I and World II is acknowledged and properly commemorated. The Good Friday agreement ushered in a new climate of respect that has been truly transformational in our country. While the War Memorial Gardens host annual solemn services to remember the past, they are no longer just a site to honour the dead, but on sunny days are filled with families and dog walkers, people sitting by the riverside watching the rowers from the boat clubs work their way to and from Chapelizod. Today, the Irish National War Memorial Gardens are variously referred to as the Memorial Park, the Rose Gardens, as well as the War Memorial Gardens or just the Gardens.

Designed by the English architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944), the idea for a commemorative World War memorial for Irishmen had first been proposed in 1919. A memorial committee was established to raise funds for a suitable commemoration. They commissioned the very best of Irish graphic artists, Harry Clarke, to illustrate manuscripts recording the names of every known Irish soldier who had been lost in the war. These War Books, running to eight volumes, include just under 50,000 names and were completed between 1919 and 1923. Harry Clarke created border designs in black ink delicately mixing military scenes within Celtic revivalist iconography. The books needed a permanent home and so the idea of a commemorative garden began to take root. It was not until 1929 that the

present site, Longmeadows, was granted to the project, and the architecture of the Memorial Gardens that we see today was built in the 1930s. Yet Longmeadows has an older history: it is also the site of a Viking settlement and burial ground over a thousand years old, so the symbolic significance of the Gardens is complex.

Edwin Lutyens was an experienced architect in the design of both cemeteries and of war memorials. He designed Lambay Castle, on Lambay Island and Howth Castle in the 1910s which may explain his Irish connections to the Memorial project, but he had also just finished a commission for a War Memorial in New Delhi for which he received a knighthood. His imperial credentials did not appear to be a problem for the Free State government; in fact, they were pleased to have the benefit of Lutyens' experience and expertise. Work on the Gardens began in 1931.

If you have never been there, let me try and paint a picture for you. The best way to enter the Gardens is from a side-gate on Con Colbert Road. In the original plans this was intended to be the main entrance. As you enter the park you are taken down steps through a dark passage of yew trees until you emerge at the top of the Gardens where you step down into an open grass arena. This generous open space is circular with a catafalque or War Stone like a large granite altar at its heart. The intention of the War Stone was to be a non-denominational monument for people of all creeds, and it is here (rather than at the base of the imposing cross that leads into the Gardens) where Remembrance wreaths are laid. Flanking the War Stone on either side are two fountains with obelisks and to each side of them are curved pergolas connecting the Book Rooms – which contain the illustrated manuscripts of the War Names. Behind the pergolas on both sides are two sunken circular and terraced rose gardens each with steps leading down to a central lily pond.

The intended and achieved effect is of a vast external cathedral whose vaulted ceiling is the sky, and whose side chapels are rose gardens. Yet that is not all. Leaving the broad grass arena, and moving away from the War Stone, four giant bay trees mark a set of stone steps leading towards the river. These trees represent Generals, and as you descend into the next level there are rows of Cherry blossom trees (glorious in April) in neat diagonal lines to represent soldiers. Walking through the soldiers brings you to a Folly, a little temple perfectly sized for children to run through and around. If you exit the Gardens by a different route, your way is flanked by lime trees, soldiers on guard duty. As the year turns, their leaves move through shades of light green to russet, until all their beauty falls to the ground and makes the path a golden river. In winter the Gardens appear ghostly and dreamlike, centurion trees skeletal and bare, in Theodore Roethke's words 'light making its own silence' They herald the landscape at the cusp of becoming, framed at the turn of day or the turn of season.

The Memorial Gardens are slowly revealed as you walk into them, from whichever gate or entrance point, you cannot see them all at once, and

this gradual revelation is part of the design, and planned to create a particular experience. Standing in the open flat heart of Lutyens' grass arena, where the War Stone occupies centre stage, you become aware of standing between earth and sky, and the encircling architecture, the book rooms, the pergolas, and the symmetry of the rose gardens, invites the expansion not only of your vista but also of your feelings.

The Gardens are a site of memory, to remember the war dead, but they are also a reminder of the power of forgetting. Designed and built during a time when Ireland was extricating itself from Empire, commemorating Irish soldiers' participation in the allied forces became a matter of forgetting rather than remembering. The insistence on remembering even when forgetting is easier is one of the Gardens' lasting legacies.

'A garden', observed Emily Lawless, the Irish poet and naturalist, 'is a world in miniature and, like the world, has a claim to be represented by many minds, surveying it from many sides.' Literature is dotted with references to the pleasures and delights of gardens, from Andrew Marvell's evocation of 'a green thought in a green shade' to Francis Bacon's declaration that a garden contains 'the purest of human pleasures.'

In ancient Islamic cultures, there is a particular design that has become replicated across time: it is an enclosed garden organized along strict geometric principles with a quatrefoil central pool or element of water. Historically this type of garden is most closely associated with the Persian Empire and particularly the vision of Cyrus the Great, who lived about 500 years before the birth of Christ. Over the centuries, his conception of a garden spread across the Islamic world, and in the sixteenth century extended to the first Mughal emperor in India. We can see representations of the Persian garden in miniature paintings: spaces with terraces and pavilions, a style that has come to be known as a Paradise Garden.

Our understanding of Paradise or Heaven would suggest that the gardens are temporal manifestations of a celestial place. The metaphor of the garden as a place of spiritual reflection is an ancient one as it represents renewal, cycles of life, sun, earth, death, burial and resurrection. However, in her book *The Garden Against Time*, Olivia Laing reveals that the etymology of the word Paradise shows it comes from an ancient Persian language that means 'walled garden.' So, this means that our conception of Paradise comes from the concept of a garden and not the other way around. As Laing says 'It was the garden that came first, heaven trailing in its wake ... an enclosed garden, a fertile beautiful, cultivated space' that gave rise to the concept of celestial space.

The Bible is abundant with allegories to toiling, sowing, and reaping. The Song of Solomon is replete with references to gardens, fountains, apples, figs, lilies as manifestations of earthly and divine love. The Garden of Eden, so deeply embedded within our culture, as a lost place, a place to which we will be restored, a place without pain or death, and one of eternal relaxation is a powerful image but one which does not represent the reality of a having garden at all.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, first published in 1667, is a passionate evocation of Eden as a place of lushness, growth, vitality but also of work and the rewards of labour. *Paradise Lost* draws on the books of Genesis and Revelation and tells the story of Lucifer's fall and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Milton's Eden is not a garden of pretty flowers in neat beds requiring little from its inhabitants, but rather as a place of untamed and wild abundance, with groves and glades and fields and shades, of ripe fruit and fecundity. Milton's Eden is not a cultivated domestic space but is wild and exciting. His poem was written at a time of civil and religious unrest in England and against a backdrop of plague. Perhaps now we better understand Milton's longing for wild landscapes since we too have experienced the fear of pandemic and the constraints of quarantine. Adam and Eve are not passive inhabitants of the garden but their job is 'sweet gardening labour' which they struggle to control though pruning and cultivation.

(Eve) The work under our labour grows/luxurious by restraint  
What we by day lop overgrown, or prune or prop or bind/  
One night or two with wanton growth derides  
Tending to wild. *Paradise Lost* IX 210-213

Eve, of course, is more closely associated with the chaotic luxuriant, wild disorder of the garden and the need to contain it, and for Milton, Eve becomes the garden she is so enmeshed and invested in. In the poem, part of Eve's lamentation in being banished is how to live without her garden:  
How shall I part and whither wander down  
Into a lower world to this obscure  
And wild, how shall we breathe in other air  
*Paradise Lost* Book XI, 1270-285)

From Eden to Gethsemane the garden and gardening are central metaphors for growth but also grief: when Mary Magdalene sees Christ at the empty tomb, she initially mistakes him for a gardener:

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. *John* 20.15.

In the Buddhist tradition the garden is both a place of pleasure and a place of renunciation. The physical space of the garden is connected to a higher cosmos reached by transcending the materiality of place. Gardens provide sensory delight but also moral and intellectual restoration. They enable us to cultivate an understanding of the world and the nature of reality: gardeners tend, they do not grow.

Reading about gardens and their importance as both wild and cultivated spaces, as physical and transcendental spaces, has made me think about the

Memorial Gardens a little differently – their perfect symmetry, their ornamental grandeur, their cultivated beauty. Because as Olivia Laing says a ‘garden exists on the threshold between artifice and nature, conscious decision and wild happenstance.’ It represents in miniature a type of balancing act: the tension between the way the world is and the word as we desire it to be.’

Being a gardener is about being initiated into a different understanding of time; we plant for a future we may not see. ‘Garden time is not like ordinary time’ Laing says, ‘it moves in unpredictable ways, sometimes stopping altogether [yet] proceeding always cyclically, in a long unwinding spiral of rot and fertility.’

Gardens work against the fantasy of perpetual abundance.

So many of our most destructive behaviours are predicated on denying ‘impermanence and decay, insisting on summer all the time. Permanent growth, constant fertility, perpetual yield, instant pleasure, maximum profit, outsource [ing] the labour ... to accept the presence of death in the garden ... is to refuse an illusion of perpetual productivity, without rest or repair; an illusion purchased at a heavy, soon unpayable cost.’ The words of Olivia Laing.

To accept the presence of death in the garden is not only appropriate to us as gardeners, but also for an understanding of the garden as repositories of loss and remembrance. Gardens require continual attention, cultivation, and labour to thrive, as do we. The ancient Greeks had a word for it: eudaimonic - meaning flourishing, or living in accordance with the best of human principles and endeavours - which also means accepting impermanence and mutability.

The idea of the garden as a space that brings out the best in us, is particularly apposite when we think about the Memorial Gardens, built to remember the price of our inhumanity, our capacity for conflict and brutality. The Memorial Gardens are a testament to the deeply scarring trauma of war at the same time as they mark our capacity for forgiveness, reconciliation, regeneration, poetry and love.

*Elaine Sisson*

St. Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church



## Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for November 2024.

# TOM LAKE

by  
*ANN PATCHETT*

There is a slow pace to this novel which is set during the Covid Pandemic in 2020. It's the story of Lara Nelson, her husband Joe and their three grown daughters. The Nelsons run a cherry orchard and because of Covid and the shortage of workers the three young women are home to help bring in the harvest. Emily has a degree in horticulture and is set to take over the farm. Maisie is studying to be a vet and Nell has ambitions to be an actress as was her mother in her life before the farm.

The narrative flips between the present day and to the time when Lara, an aspiring young actress spent the summer of 1988 at Tom Lake which was the location of a summer Theatre. It is there that Lara meets Peter Duke, another young actor and they are both cast in the iconic American play 'Our Town' by Thornton Wilder. They embark in a love affair which means much more to Lara than Peter who turns out to be ruthlessly ambitious and manipulative, he is very much the centre of his own world. He fulfils his ambitions and becomes a successful Oscar winning actor. Lara also meets Joe Nelson at Tom Lake as he is the director of the play.

The Nelson girls have been obsessed with this part of their mother's life and that of Peter Duke, but they never got the full story. Now that they have Lara almost a prisoner on the farm they get her to agree to tell it all.

Lara retells her story in daily instalments as they pick the cherries from the trees. But Lara also cherry picks what she divulges to her daughters. Ann Patchett puts it that "A secret is something you try actively to keep from others and something that is private is just your own" Lara wants them to "think I was better than I was, and I want to tell them the truth in case the truth will be useful".

The summer at Tom Lake was one of youthful aspirations, friendships, passions betrayals and awakenings. Lara wants to show the girls that despite hurts and mistakes we have to grow up and it is our choices that shape our future.

The descriptions of the cherry farm and the Nelson's life is very folksy and a bit too perfect but there are disturbing shadows as the pandemic casts an uncertain future over the planet and other worldwide problems such as Climate change cast a cloud as the cherry blossoms

depend on good reliable weather in spring. At one point Emily, the eldest who is set to marry the boy next door declares that they don't want to have children "It's bad enough having to worry about what is going to happen to the farm . I can't imagine worrying about what would happen to our kids" . A very depressing scenario for Lara and Joe as keeping the farm going and passing on the land is their legacy to them.

There are a few events that the reader is privy to and show how naïve Lara was and how Narcissistic and selfish Peter Duke was right to the end.

During that summer at Tom Lake , Lara and Peter with Peter's brother Sebastian and girlfriend Pallace, visit the Nelson's farm on foot of an invitation from Joe. The farm leaves a huge impression on Peter then and throughout his life. It almost becomes a mythological Utopian place of peace for him, so much so that when he is rich and famous he tries to buy it from Joe's aunt and uncle. Of course they would'nt dream of selling the land, but they do sell him a plot in their family graveyard on the land. This paradoxically helps save the farm from going under and what Duke fails to see is that the farm is not just a beautiful place but it is also made with and by the people who live there and their love and dedication to it. You cannot buy that. Whereas Duke is this mythological rich, famous otherworldly being to the girls, it is the real life of the farm that Duke sees as the ideal. Lara has no regrets over the decisions she has made and hopes that despite the uncertainties of the present that her daughters will embrace the future.

The book club readers had differing opinions on this book. It was not a book of impact, it's a slow read where you have to get to the last third when it picks up pace with a few twists and revelations and an ending which was hard to buy in my opinion. The writing and descriptions of the farm were lovely and the life of the actors/ troupe at Tom Lake did hold your attention.

Probably a 50/50 recommendation.

*Alison Claffey*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church



# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for February 2025**

2 <sup>nd</sup> February	<i>The Sound of Silence</i>
Service	Will O'Connell
Reader	Jennifer Buller
Flowers	Paula Mills
Welcomer	Alison Claffey, - Paul Murray
Coffee	Gráinne Carty Paula Mills Daniela Cooney
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9 <sup>th</sup> February	<i>Laughter as Grace</i>
Service	Lorraine Doyle
Reader	Janet Mulroy
Flowers	Therese Fontana
Welcomer	Trish Webb-Duffy - Paul Murray
Coffee	Catharine Cook Shari McDaid Dorene Grocock
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16 <sup>th</sup> February	<i>Can Dublin Unitarians point the way towards a new Ireland?</i>
Service	Andy Pollak
Reader	Máire Bacon
Flowers	Máire Bacon
Welcomer	Peter White - Janet Mulroy
Coffee	Paula Mills Madeline Stringer Emer O'Reilly
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23 <sup>rd</sup> February	<i>The Tower of Babel</i>
Service	Rev.Bridget Spain
Reader	Paul Murray
Flowers	Trish Webb-Duffy
Welcomer	Trish Webb-Duffy - Emer O'Reilly
Coffee	Gráinne Carty Therese Fontana Peter Fontana
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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.

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

e-mail: [hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org](mailto:hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org)

[oscailtmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:oscailtmagazine@gmail.com)

**Rev. Bridget Spain** (*Minister Emerita*)

**Tel: 085-7180599**

**Vestry 01 - 4780638**

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

Rev. Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

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

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

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

**Treasurer: Rory Delany: 087-2217414, e-mail: [roryjdelany@hotmail.com](mailto:roryjdelany@hotmail.com)**

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

**Caretaker: Kevin Robinson**

**Telephone: 4752781**

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