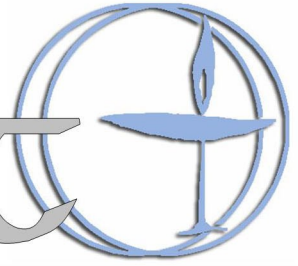


Oscailt



April 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.

Contact : - e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com Vestry 01 - 4780638

Sunday Club - Childrens Programme Take place on the 2nd Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at sundayclub@dublinunitarianchurch.org

Childrens Educational Trust Funds The Damer and Singleton Trusts

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For further information please contact any member of the committee if you want to know more,

or

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DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

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



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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CONTENTS

A couple of grunts from an intelligent ape	
<i>Jennifer Flegg</i>	2
Abraham Lincoln letter to his sons head master.	
	4
Holy Stones, Holy Mortar	
<i>Jake Lester</i>	5
Pilgrimages	
<i>Elaine Harris</i>	10
Book Review	15
AGM Notice	<i>Back Cover</i>



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 couple of grunts from an intelligent ape

I'm a slow thinker, I admit it. But there's no harm in that. Rather the reverse, in fact. It often seems to me that a lot of the trouble in the world comes from hastily expressed opinion. I like lots of time to reflect on things.

A case in point concerns a sermon that was given in this church a good few years ago by our former minister, Bill Darlison. It was particularly splendid, I thought, and it impressed me deeply. Stimulating, inspiring, entertaining, thought-provoking, superbly well put together – what more could any one ask?

Except . . . except . . . I have to admit that there was one particular phrase that bothered me slightly and has been niggling at me ever since. Not that I took exception to it, you understand, for we all have a right to our point of view, but still . . .

If I understood correctly, the minister suggested that if we did not subscribe to the idea that there exists in the universe some kind of benevolent deity or divine being, and some kind of overall plan, then we would have to face the fact that we are all 'no more than intelligent apes'. The inference seemed to be that this state was a very undesirable one and that the possibility was greatly to be deplored.

Now, there is a time to be silent and a time to speak up, and it seems to me that this time has come. We intelligent apes are modest creatures on the whole, and don't shout too much about our beliefs or about what we hold dear, and we tend to keep our heads down and get on with things and not cause any trouble, but we have our pride like everybody else and no one likes to be dismissed out of hand without being given a hearing. Even a hairy toe doesn't like to be trodden on.

After all, what's wrong with being an intelligent ape? Just think! We are at the highest pinnacle of evolution – a process, possibly unique to this planet, which has been going on since the emergence of life itself – equipped with all our attributes and abilities and creative powers, and distinguished from the animals who are akin to

us by that most remarkable quality of consciousness. What could be more wonderful than that?

This notion of divinity I find confusing. Perhaps an ape can have a divine spark too – perhaps it comes with consciousness – but I don't think any of us apes gives credence to an external divine power. There is wonder and mystery and possibility enough in the universe as it is. Perhaps the problem is one of terminology. One of the hymns we sing expresses it rather well: 'some call it evolution and others call it God'. Evolution does me just fine.

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't deny the existence of God. No sane intelligent ape would. No more than I would deny the existence of Beauty.

It just seems to me that this creation thing is always presented the wrong way round. It's not that God created us, it's the other way about. Wasn't it the poet Blake who said that all the gods and all the devils in the world reside within the human breast? I couldn't have put it that well, but I know exactly what he meant. If there had never been any humans in the world there wouldn't be gods or devils here either.

Humans created him (or her or it), and some epochs and civilizations made a better job of it than others. If you think about it, God too has been evolving over the centuries.

It seems to bother some people that intelligent apes are no-account folks, with no role in the great scheme of things and no life expectancy after this one. Funny, that. It never bothers me. I don't need to feel important. I look up at the stars on a clear night and wonder about things, and I find it a very comforting thought that we come and we go and the great universe wheels on its way regardless.

But, meanwhile, aren't we lucky to be here!

Jennifer Flegg

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Abraham Lincoln letter to his sons head master.

He will have to learn, I know that all men are not just, all men are not true. But teach him also that for every scoundrel there is a hero: that for every selfish politician, there is a dedicated leader.

Teach him that for every enemy there is a friend. It will take time but teach him, if you can, that a euro earned is of more value than five found.

Teach him, to learn to lose... and to enjoy winning. Steer him away from envy, if you can, teach him the secret of quiet laughter.

Teach him, if you can the wonder of books but give him quiet time to wonder the eternal mystery of birds in the sky, bees in the sun, and flowers on the green hillside.

In school teach him, it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat.

Teach him to have faith in his own ideas, even if everyone else tells him they are wrong...

Teach him to listen to all men... but to filter all he hears on a screen of truth, and take only the good that comes through.

Teach him how to laugh when he is sad and that there is no shame in tears.

Teach him to sell his brawn and brain to the highest bidder but never to put a price tag on his heart or soul.

Teach him gently, but don't coddle him, because only the test of fire makes the finest steel.

Teach him to have faith in himself, because then he will have faith in other people.

This is a big order, but see what you can do. For his is such a fine little fellow my son.

*This letter was written over one hundred years ago
but its truth still resonates today.*

Holy Stones, Holy Mortar

Good morning, everybody. Thank you for having me here today. Is everybody comfortable? Are you happy?

I know I am. I've been looking forward to meeting you for years. My father, Art Lester, was a minister here for three summers some years ago. Some of you may remember him; he's about this tall and looks like this (pointing at myself). (Jake is the image of his father, no mistake, *ed.*) He has often spoken to me with great fondness about his time here. He says this is one of the finest churches where he has ministered. I can see why he loves it.

Have you ever felt, when entering a building for the first time, that it's alive? That it has a soul? What do you think? Yeah? That's how I feel now. This church has a soul. So, what is it that gives a place like this a soul?

Architecture, art, and history play a part, certainly. This is a beautiful church. This building has a history. It's special. It's storied. It's wonderful. There are many personal stories reflected here: all of the prayers, weddings, baptisms, and funerals that have taken place here over the years. These stones are saturated with the emotions and hopes of the hundreds or thousands of people who have worshipped, celebrated, and mourned here for more than a century and a half. I can feel it.

But more than its stones and mortar, what makes it truly alive is the hope, faith, and love that you bring with you every Sunday. It's these things that make this place so special.

Have you ever felt that a building is holy? When I first entered this place, that was what I expected to feel, and I was right. It's difficult to describe, holiness, isn't it? It's something that speaks to you deep inside. Sometimes, you can't quite put your finger on it, but you recognise it. I suggest that this is because it's something you feel with the soul, not the ordinary senses of the body.

So, what makes this place holy? Is it because God is present? That can't be it, because God is present everywhere. Is it because people pray here? I don't think that's it, either. Somebody I know

well, a woman of faith, is afraid of flying. She prays whenever she gets on an aeroplane and maybe all the way to her destination. When travelling with her, I have often looked around at the faces of fellow travellers and have seen quite a few of them surreptitiously praying, just like she was. Does that make the aeroplane holy?

Probably not. So what is it, then?

Let me give you a hint. I'm going to read you a lovely little poem by Yehoshua November, a Hasidic Jewish poet. The poem is "How a Place Becomes Holy," and it's from his first poetry collection, *God's Optimism*. It goes like this:

*Sometimes a man
will start crying in the middle of the street,
without knowing why or for whom.
It is as though someone else is standing there,
holding his briefcase, wearing his coat.
And from beneath the rust of years,
come to his tongue the words of his childhood:
"I'm sorry," and "God," and "Do not be far from me."
And just as suddenly the tears are gone,
and the man walks back into his life,
and the place where he cried becomes holy.*

That's beautiful, isn't it? The poet, November, is talking to our souls, as all great poets do. What November is talking about is having a random encounter with God. He's saying that a place becomes holy when a person encounters God there.

In other words, a place is not made holy by God's presence but by an encounter between God and a person that happens there. When a person perceives and is affected by the presence of God, holiness happens. These encounters leave a trace in a place which, if you open your heart, you can sense. It permeates the very stones and bricks of a structure, which continue to radiate the holiness that took place like a stone radiates warmth long after the sun has set. This is what I am sensing here, in this holy place.

Trevor Dennis, a favourite author of mine, explores this idea in his short story "Transfiguration" from his book *Imagining God*. I

will read you a somewhat abridged and edited excerpt from that now.

Exiled by a Pharaoh's anger, leaving an Egyptian dead in the sand, victim of his impetuosity, driven by fear of arrest and execution, fallen from princeling to shepherd of someone else's sheep and goats, alone, Moses found himself on holy ground. His flock, or rather his father-in-law's flock, were walking all over it, and leaving their marks upon it. He stood there, with his sandals firmly tied to his feet, playing a tune on his shepherd's pipe, thinking of other things.

There was at first nothing out of the ordinary about the place, nothing strange, nothing miraculous. Just a patch of ground like any other. But then, what was a moment before mere desert scrub became ablaze with the glory of God. That's how it is with the holy. A flicker of time becomes, without warning, God's moment. A place, a patch of ground like any other is suddenly God's territory, and sandals have to be removed, and things are changed, and new promises emerge, and new demands are felt. That's how it is with the holy.

But these, you might say, are encounters that were seemingly random. So, I suppose, the next question is how does one intentionally encounter God? Well, as far as I know, there is no surefire, foolproof, step-by-step method.

We do, however, have some clues. David Seaburn, an American Presbyterian minister, gives us another hint. Writing about his experience in a small church in America, he says:

As I listen and watch, I see something that I have often seen in small churches. I see it in the lined faces of the people, often older, years of shared living and faith holding them together. It is in the way they greet each other when passing the peace—a knowing handshake, a modest embrace. It is in their voices when they sing, often off-key, yet determined and joyful. It is in the creaking silence of prayer when the sanctuary itself seems to speak. It is something that flows between them, that moves within them, that circulates around them.

It reminds me that although we often think of God as a noun,

as Someone from Somewhere, in reality God is a verb. God happens. That is what I see in that sanctuary. Not that Someone from Somewhere is coming into the room and into the people from on high, but that what is occurring in the room is God; what is happening between these people constitutes God; what is emerging, what is unfolding, what is surfacing, materializing, springing, sometimes even gushing, is God.

God is an action verb. God happens wherever there is compassion, wherever there is a struggle for justice, wherever those who are most often untouched are touched. For it to be God, I should be able to point at it and say, "Look at that. See what's happening? That's God."

"God is an action verb." What do you think?

I understand what Seaburn was talking about, and I think you do, too. As I look out at this congregation, at you, I can see it. I can see what's happening. God is here, right now, between and among you, tying you to each other like the mortar that holds the stones of this building together.

So, do you want to encounter God in the world? Yeah?

Be the kindest, most loving, most generous, most compassionate, most wonderful you, and – pay attention here, because this is important – have fun doing it.

Immerse yourself in active love and enjoy it. Attune yourself to seeing love. Seek it out. And when you encounter it, breathe it in, bask in it, enjoy it, and put your own love outward into the world through your actions, your words, and your thoughts. With enough practice, you can do this all day, every day.

Take as many moments as you can every day to actively appreciate somebody and some thing. Stroke a cat. Pat a dog. Smile at another human being – even better, smile at every human being you encounter. Be aware of the people around you. See them all, even the ones you don't like, as worthy of your attention and care and treat them as such. It's in this state of being that you are most likely to encounter God in the world.

God is in the kindness of your neighbour, the smile that you offer to a fellow human being, the tears that you shed for the

suffering and injustice in Gaza and Ukraine, the happiness you feel for a friend's good fortune, and the donation that your significant other makes to a good cause.

Let your actions be the inspiration for somebody to say, "Look at that. See what's happening? That's God."

Take these actions—this Godding, if you will—with you when you leave this holy place. Approach the world the way George Fox, one of the founders of the Society of Friends—the Quakers—said:

"Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone."

Trust your instinct when it tells you that these things that come from within you—from that mysterious part of yourself that you call your heart—are God. Have faith that where God lives is inside the heart of a faithful person. Inside you.

So, I suppose I am asking you to cherish this church's wonderful building, but to do so with the knowledge that you are the church. You are the stones of which this church is built. Your relationships with each other are the mortar that holds them together. By exercising that which is of God inside you and answering that which is of God in everyone, everywhere, you will encounter God. And these stones, the mortar that binds them together, and the places on which they lie will become holy.

Thank you all. Thank you for allowing me to share in the holiness of your church today.

Jake Lester

Pilgrimages

My address today is looking at the concept of pilgrimages. It looks at examples from different belief systems and contemplates why people were and are inspired to undertake them and finally it asks if there is still a role for pilgrimages in our lives.

This service was prompted by the book “A travel guide to the middle ages” by Anthony Bale. It’s a book that explores the why’s and where’s of travel in the middle ages focussing on those who chose to engage in pilgrimages. Pilgrimages in the middle ages were not for the faint-hearted and carried serious risk to life and limb, there was a reasonable expectation that you would not return from whatever land you were setting off for. These pilgrimages were carried out for many reasons including to fulfill a ritual obligation or to perform an act of devotion to atone one’s sins or even to ask for a particular favour.

Of particular interest to medieval travelers was obtaining indulgences or pardons. These indulgences were usually associated with travel to a saint’s shrine and the pilgrims would pay the particular church or its brokers for certificates of indulgence. With our 21st century sensibilities it is easy to scoff at these things and even to fail to understand what might have prompted people to give up everything and take off for sometimes years at a time to go to far off places, often with little prospect of returning. But are we doing those who engaged in those pilgrimages and even ourselves a disservice by not taking some time to explore why people chose and still choose to go on pilgrimages?

I think the idea of pilgrimages was something I grew up with. When I was little, everyone I knew had bottles of holy water from Knock or Lourdes in their houses. I suppose like many of you who grew up in Ireland, the first things that comes to mind when I think of pilgrimages are fairly Catholic-centric. Places like Lourdes, Knock and Lough Derg spring to mind, alongside the traditional pilgrimages of the Camino de Compostella and the Reek Sunday climb of Croagh Patrick.

As I got older and my world became a little wider, I met people from other countries and discovered that pilgrimages are a part of many cultures and religious traditions and I learned about the Umrah to Mecca and the Hindu festival of Kumbh Mela. Accustomed to stories of Knock, Lourdes and even Medjugorje, pilgrimages to Mecca or holy cities in Uttar Pradesh seemed utterly romantic, as did the more secular ones like trips to the Burning Man Festival or Glastonbury.

But we weren't an overtly religious family so trips to Lourdes or Knock were not for me and although I did manage an odd trip to Tipp, Glastonbury and the Burning Man Festival were beyond my reach and if I was being honest beyond my understanding – living in a field for a week with questionable hygiene standards and awful food – no thanks!

Anyway – back to medieval pilgrimages – reading the book “A travel guide to the middle ages” really gave me pause – why would people, rich and poor alike decide to leave everything behind and head off on these pilgrimages. Remember this was when it wasn't an easy thing to consider doing – there were no cheap Ryanair flights, no nice package trips that could drop you into Rome or Jerusalem for a quick trip to the basilica to view the relevant relics and then a quick trip to duty free before popping home again. These trips that could take several years, they were to far flung lands filled with strange people, who spoke strange languages and ate different foods and had different customs. The trip across Europe would have involved navigating hundreds of fiefdoms,, baronies, principalities and kingdoms, where there were taxes and tolls and bribes to be paid. There was no handy reviews on TripAdvisor, no google maps and no handy Revolut app to pay for food and lodgings.

So what made people want to do this? I looked to the bible to see if I could find any ideas. There are many, many examples in both the old and new testament that talk of journeys undertaken that could be considered pilgrimages. In Genesis 12:1-9 Abraham leaves his home to go in search of a land which God promises to show him, becoming a ‘pilgrim’ or ‘sojourner’ whose willingness to obey God makes him a model of faith and obedience. The story of the Moses leading his people on the Exodus from Egypt is one that plays a key role in Christian thought and the long journey through the wilderness towards the Promised Land was later interpreted as a paradigm of the Christian journey through a fallen world towards heaven. In the New Testament Christians are encouraged to see themselves as ‘pilgrims and strangers on the earth’, ‘temporary residents’ whose true home is in heaven (Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:13). Both John and Mark describe Christian life as a journey towards that homeland in which the individual believer seeks to follow and obey Christ through an alien, frequently hostile world (John 14:6; Mark 8:34).

I looked at some other belief systems too and found that in Hinduism the pilgrimage, is viewed a liminal process that establishes participation in the spiritual realm. It can also be undertaken as a social duty, a rite of passage and mode of supplication. Pilgrims are expected to engage with the sacred landscapes they encounter on the way and these landscapes are partly defined by sacred symbols, cosmographic and astrological alignments, traditions, festivals, and there is a belief that particular places are spiritual cross-

ing-places into the transcendent realms of the divine. Hindu holy sites can be classified into three groups: (i) water-sites usually associated with sacred immersion on auspicious occasions, (ii) shrines dedicated to particular deities, which are visited by pilgrims of particular sects or with particular needs, and (iii) kshetra; sacred paths or journeys, usually defined by a cosmic mandala, travelling along which brings particular reward.

I'm sure many of you can see resonances and similarities between these concepts and some of our traditional reasons for and places of pilgrimage too. Places where we Irish had festivals like Imbolg and Samhain, aligning with particular astrological events, places like Newgrange, Knowth and Knockree where we have evidence of the importance gathering together for the winter solstice. And we know that through the millenia, springs and wells were viewed as sacred places where cures could be had. These places had a special resonance for people and as our beliefs changed so the way we viewed these sites changed and instead of being associated with more ancient forms of spirituality, they were adapted and adopted into the current belief structures, but their importance remained deep in our tacit knowledge.

In Judaism pilgrimages are defined as a journey made to a shrine or sacred place in performance of a vow or for the sake of obtaining some form of divine blessing. Every male Israelite was required to visit the Temple in Jerusalem three times a year at Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot.

The Hajj is an annual pilgrimage to Mecca and it is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Hajj is a mandatory religious duty for capable Muslims that must be carried out at least once in their lifetime by all adult Muslims who are physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey, and of supporting their family during their absence from home.

So I think we can see that many faiths and traditions share the idea of sacred sites that believers want to journey to and I have come to see that these Pilgrimages can be viewed as an allegory of human life on earth. I believe a pilgrimage can be interpreted as the exteriorization of an inner journey towards truth, or even an adventure of spiritual discovery and a pilgrimage can have both a physical and metaphorical component. Indeed that concept of the importance of the metaphorical aspect of pilgrimage was one that has also found expression over the millennia. When researching for this address, I came across this tiny, anonymous poem, ascribed to the Irish tradition that speaks to this aspect of pilgrimages:

Who to Rome goes,

Much labour, little profit knows.

For God, on earth though long you sought him.

You'll miss in Rome unless you brought him.

For those who could not or would not make arduous physical pilgrimages there were options too – if you were very rich, you could pay

someone else to do it for you (plus ca change!), but another option was the labyrinth. The history of the labyrinth dates back thousands of years and can be viewed as an ancient and sacred pathway and has been used as a spiritual resource used by pilgrims for centuries. There is evidence of some drawings in Russia dating from the Bronze Age 5,000 years ago depicting one. It has been suggested that prehistoric labyrinths may have served as traps for malevolent spirits or as paths for ritual dances. In medieval times when people were unable to undertake a physical pilgrimage to far off places, they could walk the labyrinth as their sacred path or pilgrimage. Pilgrims and monks have been depicted in art work to walk the labyrinth on their knees to humble themselves before the divine. There are many examples in the Christian tradition of repetitive enclosed paths at various sacred sites.

So having explored the historical aspects of pilgrimages, I then turned to thinking about what the idea might mean to me or if the concept had any relevance to the way I choose to live and unsurprisingly I found it did. Glendalough, associated with St. Kevin, a site of pilgrimage and since medieval times, has a very special place in my heart. I've always felt an affinity with Glendalough where I had many happy picnics as a child, to my birthday coinciding with St. Kevin's feast-day and even to carrying out archaeological excavations there in the past few years. I love the symmetry of this – it rests well with my personal worldview. I think there are resonances from across time and space that speak to you, if you listen carefully enough – like the words of Tennyson in “Splendour Falls”

*O, hark, O, hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O, sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying,
Blow, bugles; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.*

*O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river;
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow forever and forever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.*

I try to listen for those echoes – I'm not sure if they are an ancient wisdom or aspects of a supernatural power, but when I get a sense of them I embrace it. For me these fleeting echoes can sometimes be a place or a particular time of the year, like the solstices, but when they happen, for the tiniest of seconds, I get a sense of the vastness of this world and the smallness of my life, but in that smallness there is a connection to every other being and

that is as it should be. So my pilgrimages are and will continue to be both physical and metaphorical. We all have only this one tiny life to lead and journeying to find that glimpse of that connection will keep pushing me onward.

To finish I will read the last few paragraphs of the book that inspired this address, they describe the final days of Odoric of Pordenone, an Italian Franciscan friar and missionary explorer who travelled through India, Sumatra, Java, and China, who died in 1331 after returning from 10 years of travelling.

Odoric's story bears out the idea that at the end of our exploring we arrive where we started, but we understand the starting point anew. On returning from their journey, the traveller is somehow changed, wise in new ways, having encountered radical difference and wonderful similarity, their home life and prior knowledge thrown into a new relief. Travel forces us to encounter the littleness of the human and the planet's variety and unknowability.

As he struggled homewards, the dying Odoric may well have felt that the earth he had traversed had itself become tiny, nothing more than a series of points on a small surface, and that the time had come to turn from earthly things to the celestial. This was not to cease roaming, but to search instead for yet other worlds. As the sun set and the blue deepened into night, Odoric received his passport to the skies, to join those released from their bodies and from earthly travels, into the brilliant circles amid the blazing stars, where the soul would begin its mysterious, incorporeal journey towards the horizon of infinity.

I hope, in this address I've given you something to think about. Hopefully it may have inspired you to think of pilgrimages physical or metaphorical that will help you on your path.

Namaste

Elaine Harris

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

19 January 2025

Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for February 2025.

The Island of Missing Trees

by
Elif Shafak

There are three storylines in this book. Firstly we meet Ada in 2010, a sixteen year old girl living in London, she is the daughter of Kostas and Defne, two immigrants from Cyprus, she is of Greek Christian heritage and one of Turkish Muslim heritage. The second story line is of Kostas and Defne in 1974 during the civil war in Cyprus and then subsequently twenty years later. The third story is narrated by a fig tree that grows through the roof of a cafe called 'The Happy Fig' in Nicosia which is owned by Yiorgus and Yusuf, a gay couple also of mixed religions. This is where the teenage lovers Kostas and Defne meet in secrecy (Defne's sister Meryam knows about them) and their love is witnessed by the fig tree and aided by the sympathetic and understanding Yiorgus and Yusuf whose relationship is also not accepted by society. The use of the fig tree as storyteller gives the reader an account of the war from both sides of the ethnic divide as it is told through the personal stories of the people she sees. The war separates Kostas and Defne, Kostas is sent to England to his uncle and Defne remains in Cyprus with a terrible secret. Kostas stays in England and becomes a Botanist. His letters to Defne are never answered and they lose all contact until Kostas returns twenty years later on a work trip where their paths cross. Defne is now an archaeologist and works for a UN backed organisation looking to recover the bodies of those who went missing during the war. Kostas never knew why Defne cut all contacts with him and by returning he finds out about her pregnancy and the adoption of their son, who tragically died as an infant. Defne and those who remained in Cyprus still carry the trauma of the war whereas Kostas' pain and suffering is from an immigrant's perspective. Kostas and Defne not only resolve and forgive each other but they rekindle their love and decide to get married and emigrate to London. This is a relationship still not accepted so they cut off all ties with family, even with Meryam Defne's loyal sister. Yiorgus and Yusuf are among the missing persons from the war and Kostas and Defne visit the run down cafe where the fig tree still

grows. Kostas takes a cutting and brings it back to England where he plants it and now the transplanted fig tree is a witness to their new lives and the birth of their daughter Ada. This is the only connection Ada has to Cyprus as Kostas and Defne have a pact not to talk about their past. The readers did have some difficulty understanding how two mature educated people still felt the need to hide their relationship to the point of cutting off all contacts and also to not talk about their past to their daughter Ada. The void created by these decisions had repercussions as Defne never healed from the effects of the war and loss of her child, she descended into depression and alcoholism and committed suicide. This painful and tragic episode is witnessed by the fig tree who sees Kostas and Ada try to navigate through their loss. Ada has a public breakdown in school, and literally screams at the world. It is at this point that Meryam, Defne's sister visits Kostas in London and acts as a bridge between the past and the present and helps Ada understand her parents and their pasts and also the culture that she descends from. The author shows that we cannot hide from our past as it's effects will surface in many ways. We are connected to each other and the past.

This book does not shy away from the effects and violence of war and how humans can perpetrate terrible atrocities, but it is not overly graphic in it's detail. The descriptions of the flora and fauna of Cyprus were evocative but could have done with 'pruning' as one reader said, especially when the fig tree was talking about nature and lifecycles. The characters were interesting and had very human traits that were believable, but not always liked. The metaphor of the fig tree as a transplant from one place to another lost some of it's credence for some readers as her spirit merged with that of the dead Defne and her love for Kostas. Perhaps the author thought a sad and painful story could do with a bit of magic realism. It was a good story and well written.

Alison Claffey

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for April 2025

6th April *Theory or Practise*
Service **Rev. Bridget Spain**
Reader **Paul Murray**
Flowers **Janet Mulroy**
Welcomer **Paula Mills - Kevin O'Hara**
Coffee **Janet Mulroy, Emer O'Reilly, Doireann Ni Bhriain**

13th April *How do we challenge Evil Triumphant?*
Service **Paul Murray**
Reader **Chris Quinn**
Flowers **Daphne Dunkin**
Welcomer **Daphne Dunkin - Gráinne Carty**
Coffee **Andrew Connelly-Crangle, P. Mills, M. Stringer**

20th April *Easter Sunday*
Service **Pamela McCarthy**
Reader **Emer O'Reilly**
Flowers **Emer O'Reilly**
Welcomer **Alison Claffey - Emer O'Reilly**
Coffee **Karen O'Connor, Nora Redmond, Máire Bacon**

27th April *Drifting Off*
Service **Keith Troughton**
Reader **Andrew Connelly-Crangle**
Flowers **Shari McDaid**
Welcomer **Frank Tracy - Jennifer Flegg**
Coffee **Gráinne Carty, Alison Claffey, Maeve Edwards**

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.

Annual General Meeting

Sunday 27th April 2025

Notice

The Congregational Annual General Meeting will take place in the church after Sunday Service on Sunday 27th of April 2025.

The meeting agenda and related items will be included in the Annual Report which will be available to all Members one week prior to the AGM.

Voting Members may submit motions for inclusion on the AGM agenda and may nominate other Voting Member(s) for election to elected position(s).

Motions or nominations for submission should be sent in writing to the Secretary, Trish Webb Duffy, at The Unitarian Church 112 St. Stephen's Green Dublin D02 YP23 or at secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com

The closing date for the receipt of motions, nominations, and other items for inclusion on the AGM agenda is Sunday 13th April 2025 at 12noon.

Denise Dunne
Chair

