Oscail

July 2025 IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE Vol.21 № 7

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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

Our congregation has two funds dedicated to supporting the educational needs of our voting members' children. For further information please contact any member of the committee if you want to know more, or write to Dennis Aylmer c/o aylmerd@gmail.com

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.

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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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Front Cover: The wayside pulpit poster.
(photo P.Spain)

Contents

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.

Why Would We Pray

IT was about 57 years ago, but I remember it well. I was getting out of the car of the parents of my then girlfriend. They were English and Protestant, and for career reasons were based in Ireland. The girl was studying in London. “I hear’’, said the mother, “that you are doing your exams,”, “I am”, said I, ……and added the fateful words, “say a prayer for me,”. It was clear from the resultant angry missive from England, that I had greatly upset the girl’s parents.

Protestants, or apparently their particular brand, did not it seems make such public invocations to the Almighty. And no matter how I explained that the phrase “say a prayer for me” is common in Ireland, particularly around exam time, or indeed death, that it’s a cultural as well as a religious entreaty, the English end of the relationship, (as anyone who devours the agony columns would have guessed), suddenly went the way of all flesh, as, of course, it was going to do eventually.

And I remember the unease when the groom at a wedding breakfast told the guests that for him the most important part of the day was the reception of the Eucharist, not as might have been expected when his beloved said “I do”, or when her radiant self walked up the aisle with her father.

And then there was the classmate who said recently that he got up at 4.30 every morning to pray before he went down to open his newsagent shop. Such avowals of faith can be quite thought provoking, or indeed, for some, quite off-putting as the announcement five years ago by Justin Welby, the hapless now retired Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, that he prayed “in tongues” every day.

When we put on our sceptic hats, many of us would ask the usual basic questions. Why pray? It won’t change anything. Isn’t prayer just a one-sided conversation? If you do pray, who should you pray to? And is not toil done well, better than time of your knees? Why, indeed, when abroad, do I light candles for my near-

est and dearest, the recipients evoking responses from gratitude to polite indifference? How do we get to know the Divine?

So, perhaps a quick run through what various traditions believe about prayer might be helpful.

The Internet, tells us that if we need urgent financial help, we should pray to St Jude Thaddeus: "Today I turn to you with great faith/To ask for your generous assistance/for I am afflicted and tormented/by the lack of economic means etc.

And then there is St Rita, the saint of the impossible (there are times, it is said, when it feels like she might be just the right heavenly friend to ask for help).

When we pray it is said, we are involved in an act of adoration, of confession, thanksgiving, and supplication when we ask God to meet our needs and desires.

And it is this asking for things or solutions which perhaps causes most skepticism among the inquiring lay people. You'll have heard one particular Catholic prayer: "Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored they help, or sought they intercession was left unaided…..", a strange claim, I'd suggest.

And many of us will have heard of multiple beseeching for good Leaving Cert results, even for fine weather so that the hay could be harvested or seeking spiritual help so that Kiltimagh Patriots would beat St Fiachra's in the Under 18s. We are told, indeed, there is even a "miracle prayer that works immediately for Catholics". And, of course, nearer to home, this church which many of us regard as another home, when our choir, accompanied by Josh, renders "O God our help in ages past…." I feel like shouting out, prove it, prove that God was our help in ages past.

The American Bishops Catholic Catechism for Adults defines prayer as a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God, and as Derek Scally (The Best Catholics in the World) tells us, thanks to the legacy of Luther, anyone seeking such a relationship can do so themselves without clerical intermediaries.

Prayer has been called too, a raising of the heart and mind to God. St.Therese of Lisieux regarded prayer as a surge of the

heart, a simple look turned towards heaven. For St.Augustine prayer was nothing but love. St.John Vianney said "prayer is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges itself". Every one of us, St.Francis de Sales said, "needs half an hour of prayer each day, except when we are busy, then we need an hour."

But the value of prayer has been emphasied not only by the Catholic Church and its saints. Its claimed efficacy and worth is spread through all religious traditions and peoples. In the book Spiritual Literacy (edited by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat) we read that "from ancient times to today, "spiritually literate people have been able to locate within their daily life points of connection with the sacred", that "to pray is to move to be centre of all life and all love".

The Jain people (of whom there are about six or seven million) sweep the ground before them so as not to kill any living thing, and pray that they "may always have a friendly feeling towards all living beings in the world and may the stream of compassion always flow from my heart towards distressed and afflicted living beings".

For others the practice of wonder is important. The Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel says that "to pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animated all beings."

Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement in the US, said: "I believe some people, lots of people, pray through the witness of their lives." An analogous view is the core of a Jewish story: A man lamented to his rabbi, "I am frustrated that my work leaves me no time for study or prayer.". The rabbi replied: "perhaps your work is more pleasing to God, than study or prayer."

And Richard J. Foster, quoted in Spiritual Literacy, writes that "each activity of daily life in which we stretch ourselves on behalf of others is a prayer of action---the times when we scrimp and save in order to get the children something special, the times when we share our car with others on rainy mornings, leaving early to get them to work on time, the times when we keep up correspondence with friends or answer one last telephone call when we are dead tired at night. These times, and many more like them, are lived prayer."

So maybe the mundane activities of our daily life can be a prayer, an offering to God. There is the well-known saying, "to work is to pray" as indeed is practiced by many monks and nuns. And how we pray, other than by working (if that is how we believe we pray) will depend very much on our tradition and culture. In Spiritual Literacy we are reminded how diverse peoples pray: native Americans dance, Sufis whirl, Buddhists sit quietly, Hindus offer sacrifice and Orthodox Jews bob their heads back and forth.

As a child, like most children, I didn't know how to pray, or what I should be thinking while proceeding through the Hail Mary or Our Father (these were usually in the context of Confession penances….a big sin would attract something like the Hail Holy Queen).

So Hail Mary, I imagined a statute of her, Full of Grace, I pictured loose tea cascading onto a white saucer, The Lord is with thee, would be Mary and her son sitting together, Blessed art thou among women, would in my mind's eye be a cluster of women nattering at the well, and Blessed is the Fruit of Thy Womb Jesus, might be a bowl of fruit, etc. etc.

So throughout our lives, in different cultures and over the ages, and as people mature, there have been differing views on the meaning of prayer, on how we should pray, and whether it is worthwhile. As far back as 1797 Mass attendance was said to be "passive" in the sense that people said their prayers to themselves and allowed the priest at the altar to get on with what was seen as "his business". (The Irish Catholic Experience, A Historical Survey, Patrick Corish).

Bishop Plunkett, of Meath, noted in 1780 a lack of respect for the house of God with people speaking and "otherwise dissipated during Mass". He also noted the custom that prevailed "among the women of shouting and groaning at every word the priest says with emphasis". Not all that far removed perhaps from the time we saw cards being played during Mass in a Mayo church, or the widespread custom some decades ago, and maybe even today, of rural men leaving the church during the sermon, only returning after a tip-off when it was over.

So where might Unitarians stand on prayer? They might go with Richard Dawkins, in *The God Delusion*, who outlines how

Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, was the first to analyse whether praying for people was efficacious. He visited churches throughout Britain where entire congregations prayed publicly for the health of the royal family. Shouldn't they therefore, he posed, be unusually fit compared to everyone else who were usually prayed for only by their nearest and dearest? But he found no statistical difference.

He also, Dawkins says, may have been satirical as he prayed over randomised plots of land to see if plants would grow any faster. They didn't, but more recently a physicist, Russell Stannard, supported a fund to test experimentally whether praying for sick patients improved their health.

Patients were assigned strictly at random to an experimental group:

1. Those who received prayers and did not know it;
2. A control group, who were not prayed for, and did not know it;
3. And those who received prayers and did know it.

Some 180 patients who had had coronary bypass surgery were monitored in six hospitals, with prayers being delivered from churches distant from the hospitals.

The results were no different between those, who unknown to them, were prayed for and those who, also unknown to them, were not prayer recipients. But there was a difference between those who knew they had been prayed for and those who did not know.

Surprisingly perhaps, those who knew they were beneficiaries of prayers suffered significantly more complications than those who did not. (One view was that those who knew they were being prayed for suffered additional stress in terms of "performance anxiety")

Many, of course, will dispute this research, and the efficacy of prayer in curing people is not a view shared widely among Unitarians.

But it could be suggested that prayer does have general benefits, to both the person praying, and perhaps the receiver although this, I believe, would only be in the context of the receiver being aware of the prayer.

Whether it's the murmur of public prayer (as in the Catholic Rosary), the gratitude in knowing that one is being prayed for, or the sense that a person feels s/he is "doing something" transcendental when they pray, it is perhaps hard to dismiss prayer as a valueless activity.

The following vignettes or quotes might portray somewhat a stance on prayer agreeable to some Unitarians.

Leslie D. Weatherhead (The Christian Agnostic) writes that regarding private prayer, if we are entirely honest, most of us would agree, that it is a most unrewarding one-way conversation which we tend to give up. "Surely", he says, "it is a good thing to give up anything that is plainly a farce, or a bit of superstition".

We should, he writes regarding health, examine our prayer life and cut out anything unreal or meaningless, but keep open "some thoroughfare of traffic with God". Sometimes, he writes, prayer seems to alter mental attitudes and reinforce mental energies to strengthen a patient's resistance to disease and even overcome it. Or at least in any sense to "sustain him in the bearing of it".

A story by Larry Dossey (*Healing Words*) perhaps covers the last point. A patient dying of lung cancer, although he was not religious, said that he had recently begun to pray frequently. What do you pray for?" he was asked. "I don't pray for anything, how would I know what to pray for," he replied.

But, "if prayer is not for asking, what is it for?"

"It isn't FOR anything," he said. "It mainly reminds me, I am not alone."

Or we may agree with the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, that if the only prayer we say in our lifetime is "thank you" that would suffice.

Or, indeed, with the Buddha: "If you wish to know the Divine, feel the wind on your face and the warm sun on your hand."

Or, we might add, what is wrong in reaching out, praying, for whatever reason, or in whatever way, even if its benefits are not clearly apparent?

Paul Murray January 12, 2025
St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

The Gospel According to Joni

You may be wondering what theology and Joni Mitchell have in common. Like all questions of faith, it begins with a longing—a search for truths beyond our own understanding. For me, that search first became real in my grandmother's library. As a child, I would watch her reading in a pool of lamp-light, a leather-bound bible in her lap with pages so thin you could almost see through them and letters so tiny she needed a magnifying glass. You will always find the answers you need in here, she told me, no matter what the question.

To my young mind that made the bible a kind of Magic Eight Ball. I hoped it had better answers than "My sources say no" or "Signs point to yes". There were Christian comic books on my nightstand, stories of Ruth and Boaz, Moses in the basket, Jesus and the tomb, I never missed a Sunday School class and Youth Group was often the highlight of my pre-teen week. But as the seasons went round and round, the more illusions I recall. If God is love, as the bumper stickers said, then why threaten us with the eternal flames of hell? And what was this obsession with sexual morality? Especially when there were church leaders, on the national stage and at some of my youth retreats, who were clearly not practicing what they preached. Then came the AIDS crisis and trickle-down economics—proof that the so-called Moral Majority was anything but. I mean, didn't Jesus heal the lepers and bless the poor?

When I went to college at 17, I was lucky to be on a big campus, about 12,000 undergraduates. That gave me enough cover to try different personalities on for size, to question everything and to search for truth—unless, of course, that truth was to be found in an actual classroom: Like Mark Twain, I didn't allow schooling to get in the way of my education. I searched in the pages of books—Meister Eckhardt, Carlos Castenada, Maya Angelou—I searched on the sawdust floors of frat houses (it certainly wasn't there!), on the trails of the Blue Ridge Mountains, on stage performing obscure German dramas.

There were new "alternative bands" playing on campus radio, as well as new-to-me classic rock and folk. 17 years of Broadway tunes and classical piano and patriotic hymns and mainstream 80s pop left me blissfully unaware of the transgressive counterculture. I knew who the Beatles and David Bowie were, but I had never heard of The Grateful Dead or The Velvet Underground. In one particularly humiliating experience at a dive bar in Charlottesville, I told the guitarist his songwriting

was inspired, only to find out he had been playing Van Morrison covers the whole night.

I say all this to give you an idea of my state of mind when a girlfriend turned me on to Joni Mitchell. The album Blue was my first taste of this blond bombshell with a windchime laugh and a poison dart pen. I fell into the sinking sand of her back catalog and never quite made it out. Her lyrics, and I know I'm not alone, seemed to speak directly to me. I felt seen in a way that was quasi-religious, like she was trespassing on my soul.

But let's back up a minute.
Who is Joni Mitchell?
Born with the sun in Scorpio in 1943, Joni was a freckle-faced tomboy on the Canadian prairie who got polio at 9 and had to fight to walk again. An outgoing teenager who learned the ukelele to play Kingston Trio songs at the wiener roast. An art school dropout who started gigging in folk clubs, so she didn't have to tell her parents she was pregnant. A 23-year-old divorcee David Crosby trotted out at people's parties, just to see their jaws drop when she performed. A songwriter who defined the Woodstock generation but didn't even play the gig. A woman who had love affairs with the greatest artists of her time and paid the price. [Rolling Stone Magazine called her "The Old Lady of the Year" in a 1971 issue, printing an actual flow chart linking her to men with kiss marks.] A hermit hiding out on the Canadian coast when the roller coaster of the music business made her "Blue". An LA transplant who never missed an opportunity to rail against the star-maker machinery. A canary in the ecological coalmine way before her time. A perennial pioneer, always the critically acclaimed bridesmaid but never the top-40 bride. A survivor of fatal diseases with a four-pack-a-day habit, who found herself once again fighting to walk after a brain aneurism in 2015. And she's a consummate performer still today, making music and drawing crowds at 81.

That brings us back to the question: what does Joni Mitchell have to do with theology? For someone who grew up with all of the moral absolutes and certainties of organized religion, it was revelatory—and reassuring—to find someone so at ease with her doubt. Joni identified with Biblical outsiders like Job and Zaccheus. She admitted to being "frightened by the devil but drawn to those who

ain't afraid". And she may not have agreed with her contemporaries that "hell's the hippest way to go", but she was going to take a look around first. I saw myself in this woman who still went to her knees but wondered where the prayers had to go "With heaven full of astronauts and the Lord on death row".

So, Joni didn't exactly replace religion for me, nor did she drive me away from it. But when I couldn't find the answers I was looking for in the pews of a church or in the pages of a dusty book or at the bottom of a Solo cup or in the arms of another sweet-talking ladies' man, Joni gave me something to believe in. This is still true today, after lapsing in my Mitchellist faith during my 40s. Not everyone, you will be surprised to hear, enjoys her particular style of music. There are even some, who shall remain nameless, that refer to her three-octave vocal gymnastics as "wailing". But now—empty-nested and armed with AirPods—I have found my way back to her music and her "theology".

That's what makes her so unique, isn't it? Joni's music is just as powerful for a woman on the far side of mid-life as it is for newcomers to the carousel of time—maybe even more so now that we no longer have "eyes full of moon". But what is it in her message that resonates? What is "The Gospel According to Joni Mitchell" (which may have been a better title for this address)? I've boiled it down to four key themes.

The Sacrament of Confession The first is the Sacrament of Confession. Joni put it everything out there, warts and all. Her passion, her jealousy, her beauty, her pettiness, her anger and her dreams. She never felt the need to apologize for containing multitudes. I think we forget how revolutionary it was to sing with such raw honesty. (Legend has it Kris Kristofferson told her to "keep something of herself".) These days, popular figures like Annie Lamott, Glennon Doyle, Hannah Gadsby and even Taylor Swift celebrate the messiness of their lives with anyone who will listen. But Joni was a pioneer in confessional art. There was a humor in it, a self-effacing quality that didn't make you roll your eyes.

According to Joni, it started as a defense mechanism, a knee-jerk response to fame: You want to worship me? Then you should probably know who it is you're putting up on that pedestal. But instead of demystifying her as person, these songs—like most good art—held up a mirror to us all. Implored us to want what we want, love who we love, own up to our mistakes and eccentricities, maybe even rant a little once in a while. In the Gospel according to Joni, the

sacrament of confession is not about punishing you, it's about making your flawed self a more hospitable home, which in turn encourages others to embrace their own imperfections.

The Sacred Rites of Pilgrimage and Retreat. The second theme deals with the rites of Pilgrimage and Retreat. Reading the news in a Paris park, romancing Carey on a Grecian Isle, criss-crossing the country on a self-styled Hejira: there is no question that traveling, traveling, traveling was a powerful muse for Joni Mitchell. She found inspiration on the road, imagery and anecdotes with hidden, universal meaning that made her songs into parables.

But she also understood the magnetic force of home; she knew that rest and seclusion could fill your creative tank like nothing else. You can't help but long for home when Joni sings California, regardless of where you're from. And when the success of the album Blue sent her into a spiral, she retreated to Canada's Sunshine Coast. Healing came with living alone in a cottage without electricity, skinny dipping under the waterfalls and springing "from the boulders like a mama lion". In the Gospel according to Joni, these outward and inward journeys are sacred rites held in tender balance, two halves of a potent antidepressant, neither complete without the other.

The call to Stewardship and Activism. The third theme is the call to Stewardship and Activism. Coming of age in the 1960s, Joni Mitchell experienced her share of protests and protest songs. But there are few songwriters of any generation who can shine a light on injustice with such wit and passion. Her battles become our battles. How can we stop the parking lots from paving over paradise? How can we sit quietly at a Banquet where "Some get the gravy, And some get the gristle, some get the marrow bone, And some get nothing, Though there's plenty to spare"? The list goes on, vets with PTSD, so-called fallen women imprisoned in The Magdalene Laundries (in 1994!!), abused children in foster homes, AIDS victims, corporate greed—Joni Mitchell never shied away from an opportunity to sing truth to power. For all the navel gazing and romanticizing she's famous for, The Gospel according to Joni reminds us that caring for God's creation and giving voice to the voiceless is our highest calling.

The Litany of Freedom The final of our four themes is perhaps Joni's most enduring, certainly for me. It wrestles with the forever dilemma of freedom. If there is one question that persists across her entire catalog, it is this: Can you live a life of creative and personal freedom and still "belong to the living", in other words, participate

in society, enjoy professional success, find a love that sticks around?

When she watches a busker in the song For Free, Joni craves a purer form of her art. “Nobody stopped to hear him, Though he played so sweet and high, They knew he had never been on their TV, so they passed his music by.” How long, she wonders in her classic tune Free Man in Paris, can a person go from café to cabaret feeling “unfettered and alive” before they get sucked back into reality’s cogs and wheels?

But for Joni there is no dilemma quite like the dilemma of love. Is it an engine or an obstacle to creative expression and ambition? In the song Help Me, falling in love *again* is not necessarily a cause for celebration. She and her man “love our lovin’, but not like we love our freedom”. Why do we fall into the trap she described in the song “All I Want”? “I hate you some, I love you some, I love you when I forget about me”? It seems pretty clear that the line she repeats at the end of that song—“I want to make you feel free”—is actually a desperate plea for someone to make HER feel free. Of life’s most existential questions, this is one of the sticky ones that defies answering. In the Gospel according to Joni, it becomes a kind of litany repeated through generations, a Zen Koan that especially women of heart and mind keep returning to.

In closing, let me just say how grateful I am for Joni Mitchell’s music. For peeling the scales from my eyes. For being my gateway drug to Unitarianism. Here I have found a spiritual home where everything is legitimate in your search for the truth, just the way it was for Joni: Buddhism and the Bible, LSD and love affairs, activism and arcane forms of music, poetry and philosophy: They all hold fragments of the answers we seek. Joni Mitchell is no Messiah, but she has for many of us become a prophet, a fellow pilgrim out on the lonely road. Divinely inspired and deliciously human, her songs form a scripture that has never failed me, but also never fails to challenge me. May you find in her songs a psalm for your own journey, questions and hearts open, voices unafraid.

Jennifer Buller
St.Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church

Rt.Rev.Alister Bell, moderator.
Rev.Lynda Kane, clerk of Synod.

Report on synod

The General Synod of the NSPCI was held in Ballyclare this year. It began with an evening communion service led by Rt Rev Alister Bell, moderator. The business of the General Synod began the following morning. Both Alister and clerk, Lynda Kane were both proposed to continue in their roles for another year. It was clear throughout the meetings that both represent a very committed team to lead our denomination for one more year. We are Presbyterian in governance. That means voices are heard and listened to and all decisions are subject to a vote. I really enjoyed meeting people I initially met while on placement with Dromore and Banbridge NSPCI churches. I also met some new people and felt very much part of the family.

Jeff Levermore, president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches also attended and spoke of our shared values and history.

This is an annual coming together of a denomination that seeks to work together to provide a free and liberal Christian community with sacred spaces and communities that share similar values. I look forward to working closely together with our friends throughout my own ministry.

Gavin Byrne
St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for May 2025.

When Things Come to Light

by

Liz McManus

In the introduction to her book Liz McManus says " My mother didn't talk about her past. Poring over the faded letters and old photographs my aunt had collected, I learnt for the first time about my mother's family."

What follows is the re-imagined story of the author's maternal grandparents Margaret and Wallace McKay. They were Ulster Dissenters who adhered to the principles of Unitarianism. They met in the Dublin Unitarian Church on St. Stephens Green where Margaret taught in the Damer Hall, the downstairs school belonging to the church and Wallace attended services while at University. They are both Home Rulers especially Margaret who is the more fiery of the two whereas Wallace avoids confrontation. Margaret's sister Jane described them as 'Ice and Fire'. They have a deep loving relationship which will sustain them as they emigrate to the North Eastern shores of India where Wallace is employed by the Assam Tea Company on their plantations. They have two young girls, Margaret and Elizabeth and their lives are made very easy as part of the ex-pat community living with servants to cook and clean and Ayahs to child mind when they lived in Mackeypore and then in the hill top station in Shillong. The author captures the colonial lifestyle as she describes how the men go out to work managing the plantations and interact with the workers who are treated like indentured slaves at times while their families live in a cocoon of Englishness dealing with servants, cooks, Ayahs, home schooling, only to be alleviated by going to the plantation club to play bridge or polo and drink copious amounts of gin. For Margaret it was a world of endless boredom and Wallace, as a non drinker was always on the outside but he could escape and satisfy his sense of adventure by seeing new places when he went on inspections to the tea plantations. This colonial existence and patronising attitude of the 'Empire' is challenged for Margaret and Wallace when they meet Miss. Barr, a Unitarian minister and member of the Khasai Unitarian church (this reader was unaware of this fact and found it fascinating) Miss Barr was a devotee of Ghandi and she

put it to them that India too would get independence from Britain and be self governing.

Margaret has a third baby, a girl called Alexandra but it is at the end of her fourth pregnancy that a much awaited baby boy is born. Tragically he is ill and not thriving and dies despite Margret's constant care. This episode is written with great care and compassion and you feel their pain and heartbreak. Margaret slips into depression and while Wallace is also heartbroken, he can get away on his excursions.

They decide to send the girls to boarding school back home in Ireland and as soon as the Great War is over in 1918 Margaret takes them back to Dublin, leaving Wallace in Shillong.

On her home return Margaret grapples with the changes in Ireland which is reverberating from the effects of the Great War and the fallout of the 1916 Rising. There is also the looming War of Independence and the rise of Nationalism identifying with Roman Catholicism to contend with. She is torn between her two lives but feels assured that leaving the girls in Ireland is for the best. She misses Wallace and the Khasai Hills of India.

Meanwhile back in Shillong Wallace and one of the servants, Baia who is also the girls Ayah form a close and intimate relationship. After a time Wallace, racked with guilt and self loathing ends the relationship before Margaret comes back. Baia is now pregnant and back in her village with the Khasai People. A baby boy is born and is called Hajom. Wallace gives financial support and arranges for Miss.Barr to take Hajom into her school. Five years later before he and Margaret finally return to Ireland he takes a photograph of himself with Baia and Hajom. Margaret discovers the truth when she finds this photograph in one of Wallace's pockets and feels the betrayal deeply. It is a long time before there is any reconciliation. (A deep family secret only discovered by Liz's mother when she was an old woman)

Now back in Ireland life is very different in the Free State. There is a growing sense of the 'Other', depending on your religion. The idealistic young Unitarian couple who left Ireland and dreamed to return to a Republic free of Royalty and Empire and was to be ruled with the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity seem further away than ever. The Catholic Church has a grip on the country and it's divisive rulings are deeply felt such as the Canon law of Ne Temere where a marriage between a mixed religious couple is only valid when performed by a Catholic priest and the children of the couple are to be brought up Catholic. (see the McCann case of 1910 which probably helped end Home Rule in Ireland).

Liz says that this rule "split families, mine too" when her grandmother Margaret could not reconcile or agree to the marriage of Liz's moth-

er Elizabeth McKay, a Unitarian, to her father Timothy O'Driscoll, a Catholic.

Wallace and Margaret left Ireland in to live in England and both died in 1967. Liz says she wanted to "retrieve my grandparents from the canyons of oblivion", which she certainly achieves through her portrayal of two very interesting people living in 'interesting times'.

The book club readers enjoyed this book as it depicts two people with not always likeable characteristics, but very real for their time and place so are understandable in their actions and opinions. The centrality of Unitarianism to their lives and in particular the depictions of the Dublin Unitarian Church made this book very interesting for us and we would recommend it for anyone interested in the social history of the emerging new Irish State and the contradictions felt by so many people while still being part of the British Empire.

Alison Claffey
St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St.Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for July 2025

6th July	*The Songs We Sing*
Service	**Elaine Harris**
Reader	**Denis Conway**
Flowers	**Jane Nolan**
Welcomer	**Malachy Hevehan - Emer O'Reilly**
Coffee	**Paula Mills, Malachy Hevehan, Jane Nolan**
13th July	*Planet Earth*
Service	**Gavin Byrne**
Reader	**Alison Claffey**
Flowers	**Denis Conway**
Welcomer	**Shari McDaid - Doireann Ni Bhriain**
Coffee	**Denis Conway, Sheila Hanley, Daniela Cooney**
20th July	*Maimed Mystics: AEIOU*
Service	**Denis Conway**
Reader	**Janet Mulroy**
Flowers	**Janet Mulroy**
Welcomer	**Janet Mulroy - Emer O'Reilly**
Coffee	**Doireann Ni Bhriain, Janet Mulroy, Catharine Cook**
27th July	*Seeking Paradise*
Service	**Gavin Byrne**
Reader	**Shari McDaid**
Flowers	**Emer O'Reilly**
Welcomer	**Sheila Hanley - Catharine Cook**
Coffee	**Grainne Carty, Alison Claffey, Charlie Kinch**

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.

Because of us

This morning I learned the English word gauze (finely woven medical cloth) comes from the Arabic word; - Ghazza.

Because Gazans for centuries past, have been skilled weavers.

I wondered then
how many of our wounds
have been dressed
because of them.

But how many of theirs
have been left open
because of us.

I haven't received any pictures of the flowers you purchased at the plant sale, don't forget. The leaf fell from the Acer tree, the colouring almost looks contrived.