

APRIL PASTORAL LETTER

A Secret Garden by Jacky

I have recently read the children's classic *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett for the first time. It surprised me.

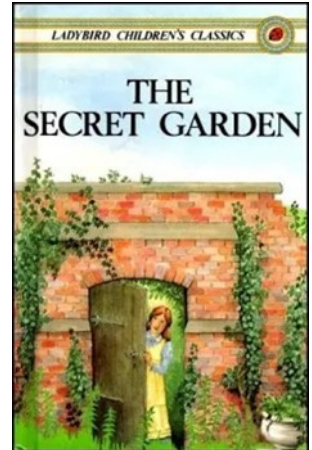
As I read, I kept expecting something terrible to occur. I was waiting for the moment when the father would return in anger, or one of the children would fall ill again, or some other dark plot twist would undo all the goodness that was growing. But it never came.

Instead, the story simply unfolded with gentleness. A neglected garden is discovered. Children who were lonely and unhappy begin to change. The earth warms. Seeds sprout. Fresh air and friendship slowly heal bodies and hearts. Page by page, life quietly returns.

I realised how much of my anxious imagination has been shaped by the stories of our age. We have become used to expecting disaster. News, films and even many novels prepare us for betrayal, tragedy or sudden catastrophe. We are trained to look for the moment when things fall apart. But *The Secret Garden* refuses that pattern. And spring arrives, because winter just cannot last forever.

The Easter story itself begins in a garden, in springtime. On the first morning of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb while it is still dark. There, in the garden, she meets the Risen Jesus (John 20:14–16). It is a beautiful moment. Life has quietly returned where death once seemed to rule.

Perhaps that is why spring speaks so deeply to the soul. Buds appear on branches that looked dead. Soil that seemed empty produces life again. Something buried begins to grow. Jesus once spoke in a similar way about seeds: "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" (John 12:24)



The children in *The Secret Garden* discover that tending a garden leads to their healing, it is their salvation. As they dig and plant and watch things grow, their physical health improves, friendships flourish and they experience joy. Life within the children begins to flourish, almost without them noticing.

This beautiful and gentle story shows us that the slow and patient work of tending a garden lead to flourishing. Equally the slow and patient work of our hearts and souls also leads to flourishing. In a garden, the work is weeding, sowing, tending and watering. For our hearts and souls, the slow and patient work is love, joy, kindness, peace, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It is by cultivating the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) that we truly flourish.

As Spring continues, we will see small resurrections happening all around us, as trees burst into leaf and blossom, as shoots emerge from the ground and as flowers open. And maybe we can notice these and remember the truth of Easter, not in naïve denial of suffering, but that life is stronger than death, love is greater than fear, and that goodness, once planted, can grow again. This is the eternal work of the Risen Lord. Easter invites us to tend the garden of our own hearts. And sometimes the truest sign of Resurrection is the quiet growth of love.

