

# Tale from the Garden!

There are many types of flowers that mean love, & the most iconic is the red rose. The red rose symbolizes deep emotions and desires. Perhaps, if you were lucky, you received some red roses for Valentines Day at the beginning of this week!

It's often said that the most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched, they are felt with the heart – that's the muscle about the size of your fist that is currently keeping you alive. Love is one such beautiful thing, & it happens when you're least expecting it: you're in a café drinking a cup of coffee, reading a book, & the person you're going to spend the rest of your life with walks in slow motion through the door. Your heart skips a beat & the rest is a love story for the ages.

But ... love isn't always a happy ending. Heart's can break, love can be challenging.

Romeo finds Juliet's unconscious body and swallows the poison he has purchased, rather than live without her.

Jack freezes in the North Atlantic Ocean after the sinking of the Titanic, while Rose manages to struggle onto a plank of wood & is then rescued.

Alas, some of the greatest love stories have tragic endings, and while it may be better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all, it's painful to lose someone you love. That being so, this week's flower is the Bleeding Heart.



One of the most well-known & well-loved of the spring ephemerals is the old-fashioned Bleeding Heart, a graceful ornamental perennial with rose-pink, nodding, heart-shaped flowers dangling off arching stems. Bleeding Heart's unique blooms delight children, & the plant's elegant appearance enhances cottage gardens & shady retreats. The plant can grow up to 3 feet tall with powdery green leaves that grow in a rosette. Some varieties have fern-like foliage. Up to 20 pendant flowers, each from one to two inches long, dangle in a row.

The blossoms have two, heart-shaped pink petals that puff or pouch slightly and resemble tiny lanterns. Two small, white inner petals and a stamen peek out underneath. These inner petals appear to be dripping from the lanterns. Bleeding heart flowers have a delicate, sweet scent.

Bleeding heart flowers belong to the 'Lamprocapnos' genus. They're the only species in this genus, which belongs to the 'Papaveraceae' or poppy family. Once known as *Dicentra spectabilis*, other common names for the flowers include lyre flowers, Dutchmen's breeches, and locks and keys.

Bleeding Hearts (*Dicentra spectabilis*) are native to northern China, Japan & Korea. The plants were first introduced to Europe in the 1800s by Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist. They became popular ornamentals in English gardens in 1846 when the Royal Horticulture Society brought bleeding hearts back from an exploratory trip to the East.

The name 'Dicentra' was derived from the Greek 'dis' ("twice") and 'kentron' (a "spur"), in reference to the two hooks on each bloom, and 'spectabilis' refers to the plant's "showy" or "spectacular" appearance.

Bleeding heart flowers carry different symbolic meanings in different cultures.

With their unusually shaped flowers & lovely pink and white petals, to the Victorians, a gift of bleeding heart symbolized romantic love & passion in the language of flowers. But the bloom's heart shape & "drops of blood" that appear to drip from beneath the blooms make it easy to see why many Asian cultures use these flowers to signify a broken heart or unrequited love. In other contexts, the flowers may symbolize love for all of nature, understanding, or compassion. White 'bleeding heart' flowers mean purity &, in some cultures, are gifted to symbolize grief or remembrance of a loved one.

These popular ornamental flowers add drama and visual interest to any floral gift, as well as brighten up any shaded spots in the garden landscape.

In the 'bleeding heart' flowers' native regions, legend has long surrounded these stunning blossoms. A Japanese folktale tells of a rich prince who fell in love with a beautiful maiden. He tried to woo her by

giving her 20 gifts but was unsuccessful. The flowers are said to represent the prince's broken heart, while each blossom on a stem is one gift that he gave her.

In another version of the story, the prince first gifts the maiden two magical pink rabbits. He then gave her two long, white earrings. She rejects him each time and eventually the prince pulls a knife from the petals and ends his own life. A 'bleeding heart' flower sprang from the place where the Prince died. Upon seeing the flower, the maiden finally realizes how much the prince loved her but, alas, it's too late. You can see from the dissected flower, how each part visually represents the magnificent gifts:



Two Pink Rabbits – when pulled apart, the two outer pink petals can each be set on their sides to show the cute little bunnies!

A pair of beautiful dangly earrings – this time the two inner white petals are separated and when held up next to your ears look just like a delicate piece of jewellery!



The Dagger in his heart - The remaining centre of the flower is shaped like an outline of a heart with a line down the centre. The heart is held up, the dagger-like line (style) is removed & plunged through the heart's centre.

Unaware of the fate of her suitor, the Princess realises that she did love the prince & so prepares for the Royal Wedding ...

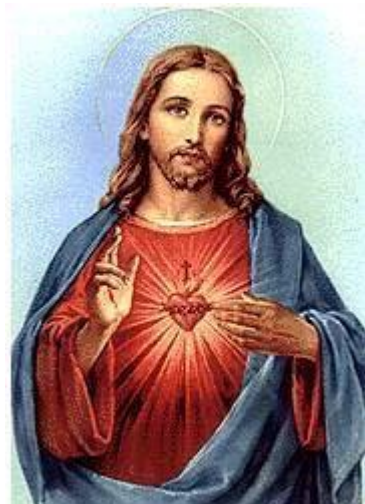


But, alas, the princess, on discovering what's happened, cries out, "My heart shall bleed for my prince forever more!" and her heart bleeds to this day.



For some Christian groups, the flowers represent compassion for others' suffering. In this context, the bleeding heart may be used as a symbol of Lent or Easter.

Are you familiar with the image of the Sacred Heart? Maybe you've seen a depiction in some stained-glass church windows or in a sculpture somewhere. Many Catholic schools have a statue of the sacred heart in the corner of the classroom.



The Sacred Heart is a devotional representation of Jesus' physical heart that symbolizes his divine love for humanity, which in turn is a symbol of "God's boundless and passionate love for mankind". Depicted in Christian art as a heart shining with divine light, surrounded by a crown of thorns, pierced by a lance-wound and bleeding, the Sacred Heart alludes to the manner of Jesus' death by crucifixion. The light surrounding the heart represents the fire of love that constitutes Jesus' essence, and to which he points for guidance. Compassion embodies a tangible expression of love for those who are suffering.

Can you remember a time when you've felt compassion? Perhaps you felt compassion for those poor X Factor contestants who entered the stage with such hope and sang their hearts out, only to be cut down to size by the sharp tongue of Simon Cowell. Maybe you feel it when you've been watching your child play tennis against a considerably better opponent and been a helpless onlooker as they double fault, hit the net and generally get humiliated on court. Or you might possibly have felt moved by images of desperate refugees going to extraordinary lengths to flee war and build a better life for their children. What does compassion mean? Well, according to The Cambridge Dictionary, "compassion is a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering of others and a desire to help them." In short, it's an emotional reaction to pain or suffering that inspires us to respond. But what does the Bible say? If we take a look at the Bible, the Greek word for 'compassion' is used only 12 times in the New Testament and 9 of those are by Jesus. The literal translation means 'to be moved to one's bowels', which I appreciate sounds rather old fashioned and a little painful. But the 'bowels' were thought to be the very core of your being; the place where all love and pity came from. Those listening to Jesus would have understood compassion to be a deep and powerful state of being, rather than a simple fleeting feeling. To show you compassion in action, take a moment to read the story of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37. In verse 33, Luke describes the Samaritan as taking 'pity' when he saw the injured man; in the New King James translation it describes him as having 'compassion.' What is really clear is that pity, or compassion, is not just a fleeting emotion. Compassion doesn't inspire a few words of sympathy and an empathetic nod. Compassion means action. The Samaritan didn't just stop. He got physically involved in dressing the man's wounds, he offered friendship, transport and he provided ongoing financial support so the injured man could be properly looked after. The Samaritan got involved in the life of the injured

man. He risked his safety, delayed his schedule, and got dirty and bloody by coming alongside a man in need.

This is just one example Jesus gave of compassion in action. But if you look at Jesus' own ministry it revolves around healing, spending time with those who mourn. Jesus repeatedly preaches about sharing what we have with those in need. Jesus was a man filled with compassion. When Jesus sees those in need, he never turns his back. In fact, there are more than 2,000 verses in the Bible that refer to issues of injustice and taking care of the poor. It's so integral to our faith that if you were to cut all those verses out of your Bible, it would fall apart completely. It's that important.

As Christians we can spend a lot of time debating some of the nuances of the way we do things but caring for the poor is something that should unite us completely, without debate. It's clearly something we shouldn't just be talking about, but actually **doing** something about. Perhaps the verse in James 2 v18 sums it up most perfectly: "...But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.'" Our greatest challenge is how we go about it showing our compassion with action. Thankfully, God has an answer for that too - the Church. With 2.2 billion Christians across the world, nearly one third of the global population believe in Christ. There are Christians in some of the world's most remote, most dangerous and hardest to reach corners. What's more, within the Church we have a wide range of skills. Together we're well equipped to meet the challenges of our time. In 1 Corinthians 12 v4-6 we are told "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." It doesn't matter what your job is or where you live. We can all help. We can all go forth and disciple people of all nations. If you think again of the Good Samaritan, he wasn't a doctor or a physician, he was just a regular guy who stopped to take an injured man to a place where he knew he'd be well looked after. He then used the resources that were at his disposal, to ensure the man was well cared for. The same thing is happening today. Across the world there are churches based in some of the world's poorest communities, in the midst of poverty, doing what they can to help those in need. They are positioned to be the hands and feet of Jesus right where they are. What they so often lack is finance and support, that's where the global Church can rally behind them. Together we can make each other stronger.

Did you know there is an organisation called 'Compassion', which equips churches in some of the world's poorest countries with the skills, resources and finances to reach out to the poor, the sick and the vulnerable within their communities. And the most vulnerable are so often children. Children account for nearly half of all those who live in extreme poverty. They bear the brunt of the effects of war and disease and often have no voice to speak up against the injustice they endure. The good news is that there is something we can do. Compassion partners with nearly 7,000 local Christian churches in 26 countries across the world. They help these churches to reach out to care for the vulnerable children within their communities. Collectively, they're supporting more than 1.7 million children worldwide. As an organisation that's Christ-centred, Compassion is inspired to respond as Jesus did – focusing on individuals, recognising their individuality and showing them how precious and unique they are. Not only are these children being given very practical benefits like food, clothing and education, loving Christian staff know them personally. They ensure the children are safe, that they are given an opportunity to learn about Jesus and his love for them and that they have a place where they can just be children and enjoy the freedom of playing with their friends. The great thing about Compassion is that, just as Jesus made it personal, so does Compassion.

So, what lesson can we learn from the work of Compassion ... Jesus wants us to care so much that we're not feeling something but doing something. Remember what Jesus tells us in Matthew 25 v40 - "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

We are soon to begin our journey through Lent to Easter & on that journey we are invited to meditate on the events of Jesus' passion. We are brought to reflect more deeply on God's compassion for the world and our own capacity for empathy and compassion.

Every heart has locked within itself a treasure which when unleashed can prove to be most fruitful not only to oneself but more importantly to the others around it. This treasure that we all hold within our hearts is "COMPASSION". **'One who is filled with love and compassion can see not the ferocity of the tide but only the beauty of the wave.'**