



BY CHERYL YOUNG

At times Heavenly Father sends sweet little blessings into our lives. For me, oddly enough, a tomato plant became my teacher and blessed my life during the course of one summer.

The unseasonably cool spring of 2002 in the Salt Lake Valley prompted me to delay transplanting tomato plants into my garden as I normally would. I watched day after day as the temperatures remained too low for me to safely put the plants in the ground. Finally, as summer approached,

THE Parable OF THE Tomato Plant

As I struggled with cancer, I wanted this tiny, struggling plant to beat the odds.

I cautiously placed some recently purchased plants on the patio for sunlight, planning to bring them into the protection of the house before nightfall.

I awoke the following morning to find several inches of snow on the ground. This was incredible—it was the 13th of June! My surprise quickly turned to frustration as I realized I had forgotten to bring the plants in. I rushed outside to find the once vibrant, green leaves turned to a heap of withered, blackened decay.

“What a waste!” I thought as I carried my pathetic plants to the garbage. But on my way I noticed something—a tiny green sprig. Closer examination revealed a two-inch

sprout growing just to the side of one of the dead mother plants. The helpless offspring had been protected from the cold and had somehow survived.

Exactly one year prior to this discovery, I had started months of chemotherapy treatment for cancer. All forms of life had become especially precious to me. I couldn't throw the little plant away, despite the fact that it seemed pointless to plant it this late in the growing season. But it was still alive, and I wanted it to beat the odds.

A week later I set the sprout aside as I transplanted a second round of large tomato plants. I applied fertilizer and stepped back to admire my work. Almost as an afterthought I found a spot on the edge of the garden for the "little guy." Having little hope for it, I placed it in an area with poor soil and minimal sun exposure. I thought of myself as charitable for sparing it as I watered it periodically.

I was completely taken by surprise when I saw that the plant was not only growing but *thriving*. It grew exponentially in the following weeks and began to bear fruit. The tomatoes were numerous and large. My other plants were puny and unproductive by comparison. Soon my remarkable tomato "bush" had captured my full attention. The plant was more than five feet tall and almost as many feet in circumference. The tomato cage that had once seemed too big for this tiny plant was now buried deep beneath the foliage. A hodgepodge of stakes and poles were positioned to support it. I had difficulty keeping up with what seemed like endless production.

One day late in summer, as I filled a basket with tomatoes, I fought the urge to let some

go to waste. I was tired of the work. I had preserved more tomatoes than I could have imagined. But I persisted to mine into the depths of the plant for more tomatoes. In the center, as I pushed the jungle of leaves aside, I saw a beautiful, red-ripened tomato. I tugged at it gently and then examined it in my hand.

I felt tears in my eyes as I looked at it and saw a heart-shaped tomato. The once tiny plant had survived and given so generously to me. How I had underestimated the worth of that little plant. It had hidden potential that I might easily have thrown away, but it had been worth saving. I pondered many things as I looked at it. I thought of the godly potential we each possess. I thought of my own struggle with cancer, grateful that I too was surviving and that I too was worth saving.

It was not until the cold November winds began to blow that I finally took the tomato plant out of the garden. The rest of my garden had been cleared long before. The cumbersome tangle of stems and leaves had withered as it stood propped up alone in the garden. To me it stood for a life that surmounted overwhelming odds to come away victorious. I thought of it as symbolic of the transformation that can come to each of us through our Savior's love.

Every year as I work in my garden, I marvel at the lessons I learned from a tomato plant that had survived against difficult odds and had given me a heart-shaped tomato at a time when I too was struggling to survive. I am grateful beyond measure for the tender mercies of the Lord that bless our lives. ■