

THE LIFE HE PROMISES *WILL* PREVAIL

By Elizabeth A. Eaton



I planted a garden last summer during the pandemic. Here in Chicago, March and April 2020 were cold and dreary. And it snowed. All around us was the oppressive reality of COVID-19: the lockdown, the fear, the daily grim statistics of rising cases and deaths, the isolation. I longed for a project that would look to the future and be life-giving. A garden would be just the thing.

I planted green beans and tomatoes, basil and lavender. I even planted raspberry canes, which turned out to be a challenge because there was a run on them—everybody must have been planting their own patch of Eden. I also planted petunias for a splash of color. When all was in, I admired the colors and waited for vegetables to grow.

With human beings in quarantine, the rest of creation had a chance to breathe and thrive. The smog had abated so much in India that people could see the Himalayas for the first time in decades. Penguins roamed the streets of Cape Town, South Africa, and mountain goats strolled through towns in Wales. I heard coyotes howling at night in my urban neighborhood. Rabbits and squirrels had the run of the place. At first this was a welcome sign of life flourishing despite the pandemic. But soon the rabbits and squirrels became brazen, and they turned their attention to my garden.

The squirrels chewed the raspberry canes down to a nub. The rabbits treated my petunia bed and green beans like an all-you-can-eat salad bar. Just as the tomatoes were beginning to ripen, the squirrels took them right off the vine. It was maddening. I tried all kinds of deterrents—Tabasco sauce mixed with dish soap, chunks of Irish Spring soap tied to stakes, constant vigilance—all to no avail. I even considered the possibility of an air rifle, but I'm pretty sure that there is an ordinance prohibiting the discharge of weapons in the city limits.

Eventually I came to believe that the rabbits and squirrels had formed an unholy alliance and were

organizing against me. My suspicions were confirmed when I found tiny copies of *Watership Down* (the rabbit liberation manifesto) tucked in the bushes. All that was standing by the end of the season was the lavender, which I found remarkable because I was sure they would have taken the opportunity to fashion little wreathes to adorn their burrows and nests. To add insult to injury, the rabbits kept producing more little bunnies. They were adorable! Darn it!

I planted a garden this summer. Green beans, tomatoes, lavender, basil, zucchini, sage, rosemary and thyme. Flowers will follow soon. The rabbit and squirrel populations are robust, and it doesn't help that my husband feeds the squirrels and has given them names. I thought about constructing a garden compound topped with razor wire, but I'm not going to do that. I will try the traditional methods of Tabasco sauce, dish soap, Irish Spring soap and vigilance. I will also place some fencing around the green beans and tomatoes. And I will hope.

Legend has it that Martin Luther once said: "If I knew that the world were to come to an end tomorrow I would plant an apple tree today." This is a powerful statement of faith in the God who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the confidence that, when "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end" (Nicene Creed), God will restore all of creation and this will be a good end.

This is the faith which declares that through pandemics, droughts, floods, famine, deadly bigotry, war, all the death-dealing things in nature and the human heart, life—the abundant life that Jesus promises—will prevail.

Plant something in the summer. †

A monthly message from the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her email address is bishop@elca.org.