

The Scriptures make clear to us that God always makes the first move –
at most, we can respond to the good that God has initiated.

- [Genesis] God blessed Abraham & Sarah with descendants "as countless as the stars/sky and the sands/seashore" – with promise that through them the whole world will be blessed;
- [Exodus] God led our Jewish ancestors safely out of their slavery;
- [Isaiah] God offers food and drink and a new eternal covenant,
and a Powerful Word that always achieves its purpose;
- [Ezekiel] God cleanses, and gives each of us a new heart and a new spirit;
- [Romans] God destroys our slavery to sin and death and leads us to resurrection.

God is the Great Initiator, which starts with the moment of creation.

Everything good thing that happens, every good thing that exists, is because of God.

Every person who exists, everything that has been created, is an act of God's love,
and therefore is an expression and manifestation of God's love.

Our sense of awe and wonder should explode with the awareness that every person, therefore,
is lovable and is loved. This is true for every person, not just a select few.

This love of God is not just any ol' love,

and it's not the "falling in love" kind of love that can wear down with time.

The love of God is a Merciful Love. Mercy doesn't just mean Forgiveness.

Merciful Love is patience and kindness and compassion.

Merciful Love has no limits to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

Merciful Love never fails.

God's Merciful Love is not just a description of what God does.

Merciful Love is God's identity; God's core essence, because God IS love.

God cannot even stop loving because God IS Love.

God-Love is **continuous** love;

it's not just eked out in sporadic dribbles as little trinket-rewards or gifts.

God-Love cannot be **contained**; it is explosive. And so that's how I imagine the Big Bang!

God-Love exists for the tiniest of tiny moments, and then God-Love explodes to become an entire universe –
the product of the **power** and **immensity** of God-Love.

And at the same time it is also incredibly **personal** – a tender touch; a soft-spoken word of encouragement; a gentle reminder of our inherent goodness; Merciful God-Love is the experience of intimacy with God.

And so, despite our sin, God cannot stop loving us – not because we earned it or deserved it,
but because God-Love cannot be contained or stopped.

God's love is the "lay it all on the line" kind of love – St Paul says it well – We can understand someone being willing to die for a really good person; or that someone might have the guts to die for a really good cause. But God's love is so much more because Christ died for us while we still sinners!

God-Love is a powerful love that conquers what seems to be the unbeatable power of death
and brings us to life again (and not just like Lazarus come-to-life, who has to die again) but death-
vanquishing, everlasting, eternal life.

Of course this powerful God-Love couldn't be contained in some earthly tomb.

My imagination does not see a stone quietly moved to the side;

it sees an explosion in which the covering stone is blown to bits.

God-Love has the power to convert **us** from the human sin of Good Friday to the everlasting glory of Easter. The sins of Good Friday still abound -- betrayal; denying our discipleship when it gets sticky or uncomfortable; staying on the sidelines and refusing to get involved; self-centered; desires for power and control; turn away or abandoning the Lord. The resurrection of the Christ transforms us from the shame and guilt of the crucifying-pain we have caused others, to the eternal glory promised to the repentant criminal crucified near Jesus, and the forgiveness he extended to those who had nailed him to the cross.

If we are made in the image of God-Love, then we have to recognize that the same power of God-Love is in us. Thomas Merton's image is that God-Love "sleeps in our paper flesh, like dynamite, and one day we will explode in a song of everlasting glory." No earthen tomb will be able to contain us.

And so every day we must remember that *we're* called to manifest that same Merciful Transforming Power; to offer to others the same God-Love that exploded to become our universe. "Love one another as I have loved you." That is Jesus' commandment to us -- the descendants of Abraham and Sarah; and **through us all the earth shall be blessed**, and then one day we'll explode in glory!