

I can't imagine the emotions running through the followers of Jesus. Not only had they seen their friend and teacher executed in a inhuman display of violence, they had lost their purpose. They had all decided to follow Jesus for their own reasons but I think at the heart of it, they followed Jesus because he offered them the things their society could not or would not offer.

Jesus offered them respect. Even people that society avoided were welcome to come and sit with the master. Even the despised found warmth and acceptance. Jesus offered them an alternative to the religion of shame that permeated the temple worship system. Jesus offered them hope. Hope for a better future and hope for an eternal joy that no one else could offer.

All of that was gone, now. It died with Jesus on the cross. It was buried with him in the cold, stone tomb.

Added to their sense of loss, there was a real fear of what their future might hold. I'm sure they were afraid that they would end up on a cross like Jesus. Or, jailed and perhaps killed in any number of ways. Interestingly, that's exactly what happened to all but one of the disciples.

They had reason to be afraid. People knew who they were. Remember, when Peter wanted to hide out by the fire, three different people recognized him even after he denied ever knowing Jesus. They could be picked out at any time. Peter had cut off someone's ear. That wouldn't just be over looked.

Their world had just been turned upside down. They were paralyzed with fear and uncertainty. They hid in an upper room. But, there were things that had to be done. The women

knew it. Jesus deserved a proper burial. So they gathered the spices they would need, and set their faces to Golgotha and the tomb of Jesus. What courage. They would walk up to the guards and tell them to roll the stone away. They had no doubt their command would be followed. It just had to happen.

What the women wanted to do was an act of love. A profound act of love because it went beyond fear and even rationality. Face it, the Roman guard wasn't about to help them open the tomb. These women loved Jesus so deeply that everything else became secondary.

That kind of love is hard to find, now a days. O, it's there, but sometimes it seems to be far far away from us.

In 1984, the band Foreigner released a ballad with the chorus saying: "I wanna know what love is. I want you to show me. I wanna feel what love is. I know you can show me."

I want to know love. How often do we say that to ourselves. How often do we feel alone and un cared for. Even in the midst of an incredibly loving family, it is possible to feel alone, abandoned, discarded, hopeless, loveless. I have, and I really think most of us have.

I think that a lot of the things in society we call dysfunctional come from not knowing what love is. Sadly, if we don't feel loved, it's hard to give love.

That's what the disciples had in Jesus. He loved them. He loved them with a deep and abiding love. When they thought they had lost that love, they were devastated. I want to know what love is.

We can find love if we look for it. The problem comes in defining what we mean by love. We live in a world that tends to see love as a doorway to sex. A hoop to jump through to satisfy lust or a need for companionship.

We live in a world that in many places, hatred, fear and greed have replaced love as the core belief system. When an adult takes a child from his home and tells him his family are the enemy and teaches him to kill, where is the love? When girls are kidnapped to serve as sex slaves to boy soldiers, where is love?

In a world where planes become weapons of destruction, where every day folk kill themselves and others for the sake of peace; in a world where people of faith kill each other, where drugs, abuse and apathy kill thousands each day; in such a world, where is love? I want you to show me.

That's the world as the disciples knew it that Sunday morning. Love had died.

But then, the stone was rolled back and angels proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. He was alive. There hope. Their joy. Their purpose. Their love was alive. It would take time to fully recognized what had happened, what it all meant. But for the moment, they knew that something wonderful had happened. They came to understand that the Son of God had suffered and died, just like you and I will, and had been raised from the dead. And all because God loves us.

See, that's the message of Easter. God loves us, each of us, so much that he would suffer on a cross, die and come back again to show us what love is.

God hears our cry of wanting to know what love, ultimate, perfect, unfailing love really is. And he shows us. God loves you so much that he would die for you. It doesn't matter whether you're a particularly lovable person, God loves you. It doesn't matter if you love God, God loves you. It doesn't matter if you can't or won't believe in God. God believes in you and loves you as much as he loves anyone else.

That's the message of Easter. God loves us and has given us the gift of eternal life after we die.

That's what the empty tomb means. That's what the rolled back stone means. That's what the angels meant when they told the women that Christ had risen.

Because Jesus died and rose again, we will live forever in heaven. Death couldn't hold him, and it can't hold us.

Now, I know that sometimes God's love seems a little vague. We question whether God really exists, let alone has any special regard for us. It's certainly possible to look at Christ's Church and wonder where the love is. It's possible to look at people who claim to be faithful Christians who espouse hate, fear, discord. You know, God loves them too. I don't think God agrees with them, but God loves them.

See, I don't think God would do something as incredible as bringing Jesus back from the dead for only a few select people. I don't think God limits who he loves to a set of checklists and litmus tests. And I don't think God loves some people more than others. I think he's not real happy with some, maybe most of us all the time. And I know that some of our own actions disappoint him terribly.

But God loves us still. And God will love us forever. We know that because God's Son died and lives again. Because He lives, we will live forever. And not just live forever, but to live it in the loving embrace of God.

When life seems to have no meaning: when darkness fills our sky: when love seems to be a remote dream: when despair and gloom fill our hearts, we can remember the tomb. The stone is rolled back and the tomb is empty. He is Risen. Hope is risen. Faith is Risen. Love is Risen.

God wants us, every last one of us, to know what God's love is like. God gives it to everyone. Maybe we just need to expect to see it. Perhaps we need to be reminded where to look.

There is nothing that can ever separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing. When it seems a distant hope, just tell God that you want to know what love is. We know God can show it. And God does. Just look at the empty tomb.