

In the beginning there was God and there was nothing.  
But nothingness was not life. Nothingness was not what God desired.  
So God spoke into the nothingness and suddenly the universe was filled with life.  
Life was what the nothingness needed. And it was life that brought great joy to God's heart.  
So God burst into song and sang to the creation:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

The creation was good. Life was so very good – way better than nothingness.  
But one day, the beloved creation believed it no longer needed God.  
The people turned in and cared only about themselves.  
They wanted to be their own gods, which made God sad.  
God wondered if life really was better than nothingness.

So God sent a flood to wipe everything away, a flood to start life anew.  
But it wasn't so simple. God's heart ached at what would be lost.  
Even if creation didn't want God, God still longed for the beloved creation.  
So God chose Noah and promised that one day, the world would be healed.  
And as the bow was placed in the sky, God sang:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

Time went on and the creation continued to turn away from God.  
And God was sad. God loved the creation, but the creation did not love God the same.  
Many times God wanted to give up. But that just wouldn't do.  
So God called Abraham and promised to heal the world through his family.  
Except Abraham didn't have a family.

But God was committed. God would heal the beloved creation.  
God promised Abraham descendants – as many as there are stars in the sky.  
They would be God's people and God would be their God.  
Through them, God would heal the beloved and broken world.  
And suddenly there was hope again. And God sang:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

But things were not easy for God's people. Enslaved in Egypt, God heard their cries.  
So God sent Moses who was to set the people free.  
But Pharaoh, Pharaoh, oh baby, would not let the people go – huh!  
And God was sad. God did not want people to be bound. God wanted the world to be free.  
Such freedom would come at great cost to God and the creation God loved.

There was much to prepare for. Unleavened bread. Lambs. Bitter herbs.  
Things to remind the people of the bitterness of slavery. Salt for the tears they shed.  
Moses instructed the people to paint their doorposts with lamb's blood.  
Then the angel of death passed over their homes as it spread through Egypt.  
Through the tears of loss, God remembered the promise to heal the world and sang:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

Finally, Pharaoh let the people go. Finally, he understood the power of God.  
Until he didn't. And as the people came to the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army closed in.  
The people began to panic, wondering if their freedom was simply too good to be true.  
God was sad because Pharaoh didn't understand that life could be so different than this.  
But God would not and could not allow the beloved creation to stay this way.

So God instructed Moses to raise his staff above the waters of the Red Sea.  
Moses cried out, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm. See the freedom God gives you today."  
The waters parted and dry land appeared, a path leading the people to safety.  
When all had made it across, the waters closed. Pharaoh's army was lost.  
And as the people rejoiced, God sang to them:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

Years passed. God continued to guide and lead the people.  
But the people complained so much. And sometimes it would drive God CRAZY!  
No matter how much God did for them, it never seemed enough.  
And God was sad. But God refused to give up.  
God loved the creation too much to let it go. "Whatever it takes," God thought.

Even more years passed and still God remained committed to healing the world.  
God raised up kings and called prophets, each to help guide and lead the people.  
But the kings often failed. And the prophets were not well-liked.  
What else was there to do? God loved the world, but the world did not love God.  
So God promised to come the people, to become as one of us. And God sang:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

And one day, it happened. God came to the people and was born as we are.  
In the lowliest of ways, Jesus came into the world. In a manger. In a barn.  
Finally, the beloved creation would realize it's worth in the eyes of God.  
And God was happy because God wanted to be near the people.  
It was risky, but it was all worth it. Because God so loved the world.

Jesus showed the people a new way. He healed, he taught, he did amazing things.  
He fed the hungry, cared for the sick, and welcomed the outcasts.  
God wanted the world to see there was something new happening.  
God wanted the people to have hope. God wanted the people to trust.  
God wanted the beloved creation to be healed. And as Jesus lived, he sang God's song:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

Now, not everyone believed God's promise. "How could things be different?" they thought.  
Jesus continued to tell people of the great love God had for them.  
But the people believed they were unlovable. They couldn't accept Jesus' words.  
And God was sad. The people lived divided, separated by rules and judgment.  
But this wasn't from God. All God ever had for the people was love.

God knew what must happen for the sake of the beloved creation.  
God knew that it would cost everything to set it free from sin and death.  
So Jesus was arrested. He was put on trial and sentenced to die.  
The people thought it was because he was a criminal. But Jesus knew it was for them.  
For our sake, Jesus came to save the world by loving it. And from the cross, he sang:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

Jesus came into the world, embodying the love of God. The world tried to kill it.  
But the world did not know that love cannot die, that love is greater than death.  
The cross was not death's victory, but love's triumph. It was finished. All was forgiven.  
Through the cross, Jesus revealed that nothing could separate the creation from God's love.  
And as the darkness of that day settled, there was hope – hope that death would not win.

Three days later, God's love erupted back into the world.  
Death couldn't contain God's love. Sin wouldn't keep God from the beloved creation.  
The women came to the tomb and saw that it was empty. Jesus has been raised!  
Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, set the world free and the love of God reigns forever.  
With new life assured, the earth rejoiced. And God sang with all of the beloved creation:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.

Beloved in Christ, renewed through the grace and love of Jesus Christ, we are free from the powers of sin and death. For Christ is risen – He is risen, indeed! The abundant life of Christ that God has always desired for the world is here, for you and for me and for all. Today, we live as people who remember that the love of God that has always been, will always be, because God never forsakes or gives up on us. Free in Christ, we join in singing the unending truth of God to the world, through our words and deeds, today and always:  
I will love you forever, I will be with you always, as long as I'm living, my beloved you will be.