

They were sitting around the evening fire...  
remembering and telling the stories as was their custom...  
When the eldest of the group said to the others:

“You know...it had been almost 70 years since the Master died...

All his friends are gone too...

oh, sure...We have their stories ...

and we remember what they told us, ...

But is it enough? I’m worried how long we can last... ”

The Romans are out for us...

Our Jewish brothers don’t want us any more...

we can no longer go to the synagogue....

what are we to do? where can we pray? How can we survive?

Where is our hope?

He shook his head slowly....

and his shoulders were bent over with over worry,

but then, as he looked around at the fledgling community of friends and believers, the elder  
straightened up...held his head high and said:

“It must be enough!

Our hope is in our faith and our belief in what he promised...

Our hope is in Jesus the Christ...

In the late first century,

early Christians were blamed for all the troubles in the Roman Empire....

The Romans were persecuting them-literally feeding them to the lions—

hoping that whatever evil they had brought upon the land would depart,

once they were all killed...

the Roman Emperor refused to believe that it was

his oppressive rule that was causing all the problems...

**And on top of all that, at the same time,  
the Jews would no longer accept them in the synagogue...  
they were looked upon as not being pure enough, not Jewish enough...  
so what would they do?**

**In that late first century, the community of John the Evangelist was struggling with all of  
this, so he wrote his Gospel: his “Good News”  
to give them hope, so that they might not cave into fear...  
he wrote to strengthen them so that they would stay true to Jesus their Lord and Messiah  
in the face of such horrible consequences for their beliefs...**

**Each Gospel writer wrote told the Jesus story in a particular for the  
needs of their community.**

**John’s Jesus is totally in control of everything that happens to him.  
He is calm, cool and collected....  
No surprises for Jesus in John’s Gospel...  
he knows the future,  
He knows his Divinity, and  
he knows the end of the story.**

**Because the people in John’s community were  
experiencing such horrible things  
and because none of them knew Jesus when he was alive and walked the streets of Israel,  
they needed a firm and solid belief in his story if they...and the fledgling Christian  
movement.... were to survive...**

**So when Jesus said to Thomas  
“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”  
They believed that they were blessed by Jesus and that gave them strength...**

**But how do we hear these words?**

**Do they affirm our Faith, our belief in Jesus and give us strength?**

**Perhaps...but perhaps it depends on whether we consider ourselves  
one of the blessed believers who have not seen and yet believe  
or do we find ourselves more like Thomas:**

**wanting to see the risen Christ for ourselves so that we might have Faith...**

**On this level, at one point in my life, not terribly long ago**

**I felt much less like a 'blessed believer'**

**and much more like Thomas:**

**I wanted to see and experience the Risen Christ for myself.**

**and I will suggest to you, that is not a 'bad' thing!**

**Is that really possible? to see and experience the Risen Christ for ourselves?**

**of course it is...As I see it, the main job of Christian religion,  
is to help people find a way to do just that!**

**To experience the essential truths of Jesus, truths such as:**

**God is Love....**

**that God calls us all to be neighbor to one another...**

**that our love and mercy ought be extended to all...**

**and that there is no place where God is not...**

**that God is as close as our jugular vein...**

**that God is the very essence of our lives...**

**that God is the very ground in which we live and move and have our being...**

**Because once we experience these teachings as truth...**

**we find ourselves experiencing the Risen Christ....**

Faith isn't so much a staunch belief in certain statements...  
or blind acquiescence to someone else's experience...

Faith is not knowledge...

I suggest that Christian Faith is a willingness to trust  
that the words of Jesus..

his teachings on Compassion, Mercy, and Forgiveness  
are the way to a genuinely happy and fulfilled life...

that they are the way to make known the Reign of Heaven on Earth...

Christian Faith is the willingness to trust that the Life of Jesus,  
the way that he loved all people and the way that he loved his God  
is the way of the Kingdom of God...

Christian Faith is the willingness to trust  
that the Spirit of God is here with us, now, in this place  
in our lives, giving us the strength, the wisdom and the joy  
to our live our lives grounded in justice and kindness and peace...

Christian Faith is the willingness to trust  
that we will be given a real experience of the Risen Christ  
when we keep our hearts and minds open to the Mystery of Life and  
the Mystery of God...

Oh yes...It is important that we pass on to the children what we believe...  
It is important to tell them the stories of Jesus...  
It is important to give them a ground on which to stand,  
but it is also important that we do so with an open heart and an open mind...  
For we can only give them our knowledge not our faith  
they may come to Faith for themselves...

**It is also vitally important we trust that the Spirit of the Holy One  
is not only in our lives but also our children's...**

**This is our Faith!**

**Because when we trust the Spirit of the Holy One..**

**we will find ourselves living in the Reign of Heaven on Earth  
that no power on Earth can destroy....**

**and then we will certainly whisper, THANKYOU! Amen....**