Mark 6:34 When Jesus stepped out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.

I have no doubt that all of you are familiar with where this history of Jesus is headed. If you would just think it out you would realize the next part of this history is Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand with 5 loaves of bread and two fish. It’s a spectacular miracle. Immediately following that is Jesus walking on the water. Again another spectacular miracle. And yet, all the things that happen on the way to these miracles are also things that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles to write that we might learn from what is said and done. Let’s turn our attention then to our text and see what things we can learn as followers of Christ. Our theme will be: **LESSONS ON FAITH.**

We are going to begin by first looking at what has happened already. That would be what you heard in our gospel reading from last week. Jesus has sent his disciples out, two by two, to begin preaching the message of repentance and that the kingdom of God was near. This is their first go as the new representatives of Jesus. Their message is basic and yet to back up that message Jesus also gives to them the ability to carry out a number of miracles themselves. The disciples can drive out demons and the disciples can heal sick people. All of this done to make clear that these men are indeed from Jesus and of Jesus because they carried the message of Jesus and the power of Jesus to heal. I have no doubt that when they are sent out they are given a time when they should return, a time set by Jesus in accord with what Jesus knew was coming up.

What Jesus knew was coming up was the death of John the Baptist. Remember, John was in prison for daring to stand up to Herod and his adulterous ways. Herod does not want to kill John, but there is a dancing step-daughter and promises of a king and the request for John’s head on a platter. So it is then that John will die. The importance of this is that quite a number of Jesus’ disciples had been followers of John. There is no doubt that John’s death would impact them and so it is that I think Jesus had set a time for their return to coincide with this death of John. And what I will tell you is that right now, the news of John has not reached these men.

So it is here where our text picks up. Notice that first line. **“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught.”** Here are a few things to note. Mark will refer to these men as “apostles.” Mark also mentions in chapter 3 that it is Jesus who designates them as apostles. It is a word that means “those sent out.” It is a word that Jesus attached to these men because He does indeed “send them out” and He is the one responsible for them and what they do.

Notice that they report to Jesus. That makes sense. They are sitting around and discussing the things that happened to them as they went about preaching. Lots of stories, lots of success in the fact that they could do healings, and lots of happiness, dare I say it, in the fame they would gain from this. They are there reporting, learning, and being guided by Jesus in this new life of ministry.

And then we are told in other Gospels that others come. I don’t think it was hard to find Jesus. But others come, the disciples of John who had gone to Herod, retrieved the body and buried John. This group, a few of them at least, come and report to Jesus what has taken place. Remember, news back then traveled much slower than news today. I can tell you that this news is already two or three days old but it is going to have an impact on Jesus and his disciples. What you have to do is read all the accounts of this found in the Gospels and the picture becomes a bit clearer. There is Jesus with the disciples, rejoicing in the events of the ministry they had carried out and now here others come with news that John the Baptist has died at the hands of Herod.

Can’t you just hear how the conversation has now changed? From this and that happened, how this person was healed, this demon cast out, how they found the generosity of the people to them as teachers but now others come and the conversation becomes, “John is dead!” John was a cousin to Jesus and no doubt this news saddened Jesus. Many of the disciples of Jesus had been followers of John and no doubt this news kind of rattles them. Why? Not just a friend and teacher, but a preacher killed. John was a preacher, clearly connected to and with Jesus as the forerunner to Jesus and now John, because of his message, his ministry, is dead. A servant of the Lord dead. Murdered! These men were just learning to be servants, just learning to go out in the name of Jesus. Is this what they could expect? That their teaching and their ministries could lead to their deaths? Doubts arose. Questions were asked. Some of them might have thought, “Well, just maybe we need to change what we are preaching? Just maybe we need to back off a bit and not be so adamant about this repentance stuff. Let’s just go out there, do miracles, gain fame and followers and once we have this kingdom of yours established Jesus, then we can get back to the heavy stuff.” This death has an impact on their lives!

I know, you think I am being dramatic. I don’t. Look at the text. A dramatic change has taken place. Here is the verse, **“He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.”** They were discussing happy, victorious things and now there is a change. A change that clearly called for seclusion, getting away from interruptions, getting time to be able to more thoroughly discuss events. For that matter, Jesus tells them they need rest! Let’s just contemplate that!

Because I will tell you I don’t think Jesus just means “rest,” as in get a nap and some sleep. I think Jesus is emphasizing the idea of “Sabbath.” Like the Third Commandment: “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.” Do you remember what you learn there? Answer 54: *“This special will of God is no longer in effect since Christ fulfilled the Old Testament Sabbath by giving us the true rest, the forgiveness of sins.” And answer 55: “God wants all people to receive his Word eagerly because it tells about Jesus, who gives us God’s true rest.”* This is the rest, the Sabbath, Jesus is speaking to his disciples about. They needed to hear the plan, the Word of God more thoroughly. They needed to be reminded that the Lord would take care of them and watch over them in any and all circumstances. They had just learned that somewhat as they went out only with staffs in their hands to preach. Their food, their needs, their welfare would be taken care of by the Lord as He moved people to share with the disciples. And evidently that had happened. Now, with this news of John rattling them, how about a deeper reminder of the plans and marvel of God.

So Jesus wanted them alone to speak of the deeper things of God. John’s death was still in keeping with the will of the Father. Trouble, turmoil, difficulty, the seemingly impossible task of being preachers of the truth in a world that doesn’t want to hear truth, those things needed to be spoken of. And maybe, just maybe Jesus told them all that in truth, as his followers, they would all die for the sake of his name. Here is Jesus taking his disciples aside, taking them where He can speak directly to them of their lives and futures and here is Jesus reminding them that no matter what, they need to trust and rely on Him and his gracious promises. Rely on Him, trust in Him, and put their faith in Him! That’s the importance of what happens here.

And here is why I say that. Jesus and the disciples will get into a boat and they will cast away from shore heading northeast on the Sea of Galilee. It is while they were in the boat, alone, with each other, that Jesus tells them these things, things just for the disciples and them alone at this time. And I wonder, is this the turning point for Judas? Judas who will betray Jesus. Judas who will stop trusting in Jesus and relying on Jesus. Because by the time all the things that are going to take place at this time happen, some deep lessons will be learned. Here is why I say this.

The next thing to happen will be landing on the shore and finding that all the people have followed them along the shoreline. Jesus has compassion on the crowd and begins to teach them. The teaching stretches into the late hours. Jesus wants the crowd fed and asks his disciples about it. Again pay attention to all the accounts of this and you will find that John’s gospel mentions that Jesus was testing them when it came down to the feeding. This feeding is really going to be a test of faith for the disciples. Do you trust Jesus, can you rely on Jesus, do you grasp that Jesus will do what is always best? So the five thousand are fed from five loaves and two fish. And there are twelve basketfuls of left-overs! Do you know that this is the only miracle reported by all four Gospels! This miracle and what follows is the turning point for the disciples, at least for the majority of them. One will come out different.

So the feeding takes place and then the mood of the crowd changes. Jesus knows what is going on, hustles his disciples into the boat, sends them off and then dismisses the crowd by himself. Then Jesus goes off to pray because again Jesus knows what is coming.

The disciples are on the lake. We are told the wind was against them and they were struggling with getting anywhere. Jesus walks out to them on the water, Peter will walk on the water briefly and then Jesus enters the boat, the wind stops and they get another glimpse at the power of Jesus. They get to land. When they land, crowds gather again, including many who were at the feeding.

John’s gospel gives us the details. The people knew Jesus had not been on the boat when it left but that now he was. They ask, Jesus teaches, things are brought out, they want Jesus as their king, Jesus ends up teaching about the Bread of life which is him. Many followers of Jesus will now desert him. They don’t like this teaching. They don’t like Jesus’ attitude. They grasp Jesus won’t meet their demands and thus begins the rejection of Jesus by the crowds, a rejection that will end up with Jesus on the cross! Did you know all of this is happens here? This is the beginning of the year of opposition to Jesus. Despite the miracles, people don’t want Jesus anymore because Jesus isn’t cooperating in what they want.

I believe, as I suggested before that this is the turning point for Judas too! Judas wanted Jesus as a king. Judas wanted to be a co-ruler, a big shot with Jesus. That was all falling apart now. Jesus wasn’t meeting what Judas was hoping for. That’s the reason, as the people leave, that Jesus turns to the disciples and says, “You don’t want to leave too, do you?” And though Peter confesses boldly that there was no place else to go because Jesus has the words of life and is the Son of God, Jesus responds to that confession by saying for the first time, **“Yet one of you is a devil!”** Yep, Judas’ heart has been changed.

When you have the whole picture you begin to see the importance of all that unfolds here. Following Jesus is about trusting Jesus, about listening to Jesus and about doing it in keeping with what God’s Word says, because Jesus is the living Word, the Word of life. You can’t decide, “I am going to believe in Jesus but not this part or that part!” You can’t reject the word of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus and still remain a follower. For that matter, you need to even grasp that following Jesus might actually be somewhat stressful, challenging and difficult. Yet clearly we are being taught to trust Jesus no matter what!

John the Baptist got executed because he followed God’s Word and Jesus. The disciples, all of them but John, will die because they follow Jesus. The world walks away from Jesus because what He teaches is hard stuff and doesn’t fit what the world wants. Here is faith. You can be the eleven who stick with Jesus no matter what or Judas, who we will learn is already a devil, a rejecter of Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

What it boils down to is that this lesson is about trust in Jesus. The wonders that happen are because of Jesus! The difficulties that happen, Jesus can help with. Just trust Jesus. Even when you don’t think there is any way to feed five thousand, trust Jesus! Even when the world walks away, trust Jesus! As you see Jesus hanging on the cross, trust Jesus! As you hear of the resurrection, seemingly impossible, trust Jesus!

That’s what I see in Jesus. Jesus is with me, watching over me, taking care of my needs both spiritually and physically. Jesus loves me and wants me and all the world to be saved. Jesus is the Son of God and my Savior. Jesus will give his life for me and you, give us eternal life because He lives and He sits at the right hand of God over all things. You can be a follower that has a compassionate shepherd in Jesus or you can walk away from the shepherd, as many would.

Let us trust Jesus! Let us know Jesus. Let us hear what Jesus says and know the eternal life that is ours in Jesus! Amen.