

March 27, 2011 - I Can't Believe My Eyes

I can't believe my eyes! I was thinking of that statement this week and I was trying to think "well, when would I use that?" and most of the examples that came up in my head of when that might be exclaimed for some reason, came back to sporting events like, you see a circus catch and you say "Oh! I can't believe my eyes", or a spectacular save and you say "Oh! I can't believe my eyes". Or in honour of the bonspiel going on, I thought "well why not in curling" and then I thought "well, not usually in curling". But, every now and then in curling a person will make a shot and I can't help but say "I can't believe my eyes" at what I just saw. Maybe for some of you the 'I can't believe my eyes' statement came out when you first saw that special someone. You know, your eyes met from across a crowded room and the people parted like the red sea and the soft lights shone down from the heavens and harps started playing and things like that. Maybe that's when you exclaimed "I can't believe my eyes".

I was thinking about my special someone and when we met. That wasn't exactly our scenario, but I was thinking just before we got married we did some of the Pre-marriage counseling which is always a good thing to do. We learned lots of interesting things from that and as part of that we took this little inventory thing where the guy fills out the survey and the girl fills out the survey and then they compare your results and kind of the standard is supposed to be, if you are two or more digits apart in your answers then that's something maybe you should talk about. And so I went through and filled my answers in. I'm a fairly easy-going, even-keeled kind of go with the flow kind of guy, so 90% of my answers were 3's. Now, my wife is (I'm picking the word that will get me in the least amount of trouble), a lot more definite about her opinions. So, when she did hers, 90% of her answers were 1's and 5's. Now, if you remember the standard we were going by, if you are two or more digits apart that's something you need to talk about which means about 80-90% of our questions came back as something we needed to talk about and work through. Fortunately, once we worked out that she's a one or five kind of person and I'm a three kind of person, we worked through that issue and that cleared up most of the rest of them.

But, I am a three and so, I have a hard time thinking of a situation where I would be excited enough to like exuberantly, exclaim "Oh, I just can't believe my eyes" at that and I tried to think of a situation and I thought "Well, maybe when I drive by the gas station and see the latest prices I might exclaim that but, unfortunately I can believe it, I don't like it, but I can believe what the prices are. And I thought well maybe sometimes when you see a magic show and the magician does something that's just totally incredible and you say "Oh, I just can't believe my eyes" at that. But, I'm a fairly rational person, so I know it's an illusion, I know it's not real. I know next time Roy will be back in one piece, and so I'm a three and I have a tough time getting to that point of just exclaiming "Oh, I can't believe my eyes, this is so incredible, this is so wonderful".

I think sometimes reading stories in the bible and especially in the Gospels because we read these stories a lot and we see Jesus doing some of the same things over and over again so we no

longer have that sense of awe and amazement and astonishment and astoundedness, when we read through the Gospel stories and we see Jesus at work.

So what I'd like to do this morning is just unpack those three stories that Dave and the team read for us earlier out of Mark's Gospel, Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 and try and help us recapture some of the "I can't believe my eyes" about the stories. I think if we read these stories properly and if we really grasp what's happening in these stories, our jaws should be on the ground at what Jesus has done.

So, let's quickly look through these stories once again. There's three things that I can't believe about these stories when I read through them. And the first is the situation. When I read through them, I just can't believe what actually happens in these stories. I mean we've read them a lot so we just kind of read through them and think "Yeah, this happened, this happened, yeah, Jesus did that, we know all that". But when you read through it and you try and read through it as if for the first time, I just can't believe what happens. I can't believe the events that transpired. So, we're going to start out with the feeding of the 5,000 which is in Mark, Chapter 6 and the feeding of the 5,000 is just one of only two miracles that's recorded in all four of the Gospels. I'm not going to tell you what the second one is. If you think you know come tell me afterwards and I'll let you know if you're right. But, there must be something significant going on here because all of the Gospel writers feel like it's important enough to remember.

Now a couple of things we need to know about the story. First of all, 5,000 people, is a lot of people. The Blades averaged 4,400 people at their games this year. So 5,000 people is a little bit more than that. So try and envision, if you can, how many people are at an average Blades' game and kind of put that into your mind. But, the text actually says that it's literally 5,000 men who are there and so most scholars agree that the actual number of people, when you include the women and children is more like 10 or 15 and I've seen some speculate as high as 25,000 people. So try and get some of those numbers in your head and envision how many people that's going to be.

When Mark tells the story, Jesus tells his disciples to go get some food, and they say it would take more than 8 month's wages to buy enough food for that. Now I figure since it's tax time, most of you should have your gross income for 2010, somewhere close to the top of your brain. So think about what your gross income was last year and now figure out what 2/3 of that was. Now take that dollar amount and imagine going to Safeway and buying groceries with every penny of it. That's how much food was needed to feed these people. Okay? Now you're getting a bit of the sense of the magnitude of it.

Now you may wonder, now why would they just count the men? What's up with that? Well, John tells us in his account of the story, that after it was over, the people wanted to make Jesus king, by force, and if you're going to make someone king, by force, the one thing you're going to need is an army. And if you're trying to raise an army, what you want to know is, how many

able-bodied fighting men you have to put in that army. So that's why they counted 5,000 men which ironically, a Roman legion has approximately, anyone want to guess? 5,000 men in it. So that's probably why they just counted the men and not everyone else. So, 5,000 people or more like 10,000 people, is a lot of people.

But, not only that, 5 loaves and 2 fish, is not a lot of food. And when you think of the loaves, we have to get an accurate picture of what the loaves were like. It's not like one of those super-jumbo subs that you like to get that are 6 or 8 feet long. That's not what it was like. And the fish wasn't like a tuna or something that's really huge and large, no, the bread and the fish that are in this story are much, much, different. In fact, the bread was a small little loaf. One commentator describes it like this: "these were not like English loaves, they were more like rolls. John tells us they were barley loaves and barley loaves were the food of the poorest of the poor. Barley bread was the cheapest and coarsest of all bread." So, this bread wasn't a big loaf it wasn't even your average loaf of Wonder Bread. This is a small little loaf of bread. And the fish. There's some speculation on the size of the fish. Some people say the fish were as small as sardines. I'm going to be generous here and go with the upper-end of the scale, when people speculate. More on the size of a pickled herring or a kipper or something. This fish is a Tilapia. Some of you may have eaten Tilapia but actually this area of Galilee is famous for producing Tilapia so that's the fish we've chosen. Still, they're not very big.

I'm still having some issues getting a grasp on how much food this was going to be so I thought "what could I find that was modern and tangible where there was bread and fish put together." And I thought about it and I realized, a Filet of Fish would be a perfect example for us. And so I thought "Well let's count a Filet of Fish to represent the loaves and fishes that they had". So, we'll put that there and give him four friends and so I thought, well I looked at a Filet of Fish and it's only this big so I want to be generous here so we'll add 5 more Filet of Fish and so 10 Filet of Fish are going to represent our 5 loaves and 2 fishes. So, I did the math a little bit and I thought, if 10,000 people were fed with 10 Filet of Fish, that means 1,000 people were fed with one Filet of Fish. And that means that 100 people, would have been fed with 1/10th of one Filet of Fish. I was having a hard time grasping that so last night, on the way home, I went through the Drive-through and I picked up a Filet of Fish. I went home and meticulously cut it into 10 pieces. I was going to show you what that looked like but it's so small I didn't think that would work so I brought 3 - 1/10ths of a Filet of Fish. I'm going to pass these around. Now what I want you to do as I pass these around is you look at this, don't eat it, it's been sitting out for awhile, one for each section here. What I want you to do, usually on a Sunday morning, when everyone is here, the kids are here, the teachers are here, usually this room, we have 100 people, 110 people, give or take. So look at what's in that container and imagine everyone that's in the building here this morning, eating from what's in that container. If I said "you know what, spontaneous pot-luck after service, I've brought all the food, that one container is going to feed all of us. And not only does it feed all of us, according to the Gospel account, it says: "Everyone ate and was satisfied". And the word he uses for satisfied doesn't mean "content" or doesn't mean we all got enough to get by, the word he uses for 'satisfied' means, loosen your belt, get your stretchy pants, stuffed to the gills, full. And that's

what Jesus did with that little, tiny, amount of food. And when it was all done, the disciples went around and they collected 12 baskets of leftovers. And you'll notice that 12 baskets fits nicely with 12 disciples and so they each had a basket of leftovers. Just imagine what it was like that night when they left on the boat, each of them carrying their basket full of food and most, if not all, of the disciples had seen the 5 loaves and 2 fishes they had started out with and just sitting there and thinking "I got in this basket, more food than we started out with and I know that Peter has got one; and John's got one and James has one and Andrew has one, and all the rest of the guys have a basket just like this, and we fed 10,000 people in between." Imagine what that would have been like.

On to our second story. Second story takes place on the sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is about 53 km long and 21 km wide. So after He feeds the 5,000, Jesus sends His disciples onto the boat. This is a picture from the NW side of the lake, kind of looking out onto the lake, so it's a big body of water that these guys are going to go out on, on their boat. When they're out on the lake the wind starts blowing and the disciples are straining at the oars. That star (on map shown) roughly approximates where the feeding of the 5,000 was, and so Jesus tells His disciples "Guys, get in the boat and just kind of sail back to Bethsaida", which is where they had started from at the beginning of the day. And the wind is so strong and it's blowing them so hard that by the end of the story they end up docking at Geneserat. And that's how much the wind was against them and they were straining at the oars, fighting to go with it. And the story actually says when Jesus catches up with them they are in the middle of the Lake. And so, if you can see where they started and where they were headed, the middle of the Lake is not where they were supposed to be. And so, they're out here in the middle of the Lake and it says, sometimes between 3 and 6 a.m. Jesus decided to head out and walk across the Lake. The disciples see Him walking across there and they think He's a ghost and they kind of freak out and so Jesus says "Don't worry, it's Me", He gets in the boat and as soon as He gets in the boat, the wind dies down and it's calm and they row their way into the dock.

Now, if you've heard this story before, you may be wondering why in the story that we read, why was there no mention of Peter. In the other gospels some of them talk about Peter getting out of the boat, walking to Jesus, and then falling down into the water. And you say "well, why doesn't Mark talk about that?" Well, here's a quiz now, a couple of weeks ago I told you who was Mark's source for all of his material about Jesus? Peter. And so this is not one of Peter's shining moments and so, either Mark out of deference to Peter, or maybe Peter just never talked about it very much, Mark doesn't include that story in his account. Okay.

Third story. Really quick. The feeding of the 4,000. The feeding of the 4,000 is kind of the overlooked younger sibling of the feeding of the 5,000. And if you're the younger sibling you know how that goes. You're just kind of over-shadowed by your elder sibling and everyone is trying the measure you up to him and you have to kind of match up to all that and you're being judged by all that. And that's kind of how the feeding of the 4,000 kind of comes off in the Gospels. It's not in all four Gospels, it's only in Matthew and Mark and no one really talks about it. I struggled to find a picture of the feeding of the 4,000. I Googled pictures all

day long and every time I said “feeding of the 4,000” it would give me a picture of the feeding of the 5,000. And I read commentaries and they would have pages and pages about the feeding of the 5,000 and then I’d read about the feeding of the 4,000 and they’d say “pretty much like the first one except for a couple things” and they’d say “this, this and this”. And so, the feeding of the 4,000 is kind of overshadowed and overlooked by the feeding of the 5,000. But, I think if we look at it closely, I think we’re going to find that there are some differences in it, that actually make it just as impressive and in some ways, more impressive than the feeding of the 5,000 despite the fact that we just skip right over it.

So, let’s compare these two. Mark 6 and Mark 8. In Mark 6, there is the feeding of the 5,000 which we’re counting as 10,000. In Mark 8, there were 4,000 which we’re going to count as 8,000. Now, initially you say, more people, but there’s a bigger significance here because in Mark 6, the 10,000 people would have been predominantly Jewish people. But in Mark, Chapter 8, the 8,000 people, were predominantly Gentile people. And that’s significant to me as I read that story because lots of times we have this image of Jesus where He’s just going around and talking to the Jews and then after, you know in the Book of Acts and so on and so on, then the Church kind of spreads out. But Mark especially paints a picture of Jesus who, He’s talking to the Jews and then He goes across the Lake and talks to the Gentiles and then He goes back and forth and does miracles on both sides. So, I think it’s significant that those 8,000 people are Gentiles. You may be wondering how does a Jewish Rabbi get 8,000 Gentiles to come out and listen to Him talk. Well, this miracle takes place in the region of the Decapolis and you might remember from last week in Mark Chapter 5, that Jesus had been in the Decapolis and He had met this man who was possessed by a bunch of demons and He cast them out and they ran into a bunch of pigs who jumped off the cliff. And at the end of that story, the man says “Let me come with you Jesus” and Jesus says “No, stay here and go home and tell everyone what God has done for you”. And I think it’s probably because of that guy going around and telling people what Jesus had done for him on his last visit and when Jesus comes over again, this great big crowd of people comes out to visit and listen to Him.

Mark 6, there’s 5 loaves, Mark 8, there’s 7 loaves. So, right off the top, you do the math and you say “Mark 6 has more people and less bread, Mark 8 has less people and more bread so clearly, Mark 6 is the more exciting miracle.” Do the math, about 2,000 people per loaf in Mark 6 and Mark 8, you’re down to a measly 1,143 people per loaf. Now that may seem a little lackluster or something, but when you consider that the previously held record, comes from way back in 2 Kings, Chapter 4, where the prophet Elisha fed 100 men with 20 loaves, and if you do the math, that’s 5 people per loaf. And if you look back, that was the previous best. 5 people per loaf. Then 1143 starts to look a little bit more impressive.

But the real big difference between these two miracles, and I think this is the tipping point for the feeding of the 4,000 comes, when we look at the baskets. Because, when we compare the baskets to the baskets, we’re actually comparing apples to the oranges because when we read in Mark Chapter 6, the word he uses for baskets is ‘kophinos’. That was a Jewish kind of basket, small at the top, big at the bottom, that most Jews carried with them most of the time and what they’d do, they’d pack a little food in there and carry it with them so they’d have kosher food

with them when they needed it. And so we have this little basket and they collected 12 of them, so just for something to hang onto here, think of like your average kind of picnic basket, that's what we're dealing with in Mark, Chapter 6.

Mark, Chapter 8, the word he uses is 'sphuris'. And a sphuris looks something more like this. Think of Marion in Readers of the Lost Ark. It's big enough to put a person in. In fact, In Acts, Chapter 9, we have story of Saul and he's in Damascus and the Jews are really upset with him and they want to kill him and they're guarding the gate by day and by night just to make sure he can't get away. And so then down in Verse 25 we read: "His followers took him by night and lowered him with a sphuris, through an opening in the wall. So, now we're comparing 12 picnic baskets to 7 of these big, big, baskets and so, sure there was a few more people and sure there were 2 less loaves, but they ended up with a whole lot more of the leftovers. And so, I think Mark 8 kind of holds its own in that. If nothing else, it proves that the first time wasn't a fluke, it wasn't a gimmick, it wasn't just an illusion or something but the Jesus actually had the power to do this again and again. And maybe the most impressive part of the story in Mark 8 is that it says that the people had been there listening to Jesus for 3 days without anything to eat. You think my sermons are long? But they were there for 3 days with nothing to eat, Jesus fed them all, had all this food left over.

Now, these are three undeniably amazing events. But believe it or not, the 'What' is not the most incredible part of the stories. Here's the second thing I can't believe about these stories. I can't believe the motivation behind them. We're going to take another really quick look and see why Jesus did what He did in each of these stories. At the beginning of the 'feeding of the 5,000' story, the disciples had just come back from preaching all over the country and they came back and it says "Jesus noticed that they were tired and worn out" and so He says "Come with me, by yourselves, to a quiet place and get some rest" and so they sailed off and when they saw the people when they landed, Jesus saw the crowd and He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and so he began teaching them many things." And that compassion that caused Jesus not to send them away when he arrived at the dock is the same compassion that caused Jesus to not send them away when they needed to find food. The story of the feeding of the 4,000, very similar scenario where the crowd gathers and since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called the disciples and said "I have compassion for these people, they have already been with me three days and have had nothing to eat, if I send them home hungry they will collapse on the way because some of them have come a long distance."

And perhaps maybe the most interesting is the walking on water. The story begins when Jesus sends the disciples across the Lake and He stays to pray. And it says He goes up on a mountainside and when he goes up on the mountainside praying, He sees the disciples straining at the oars. And I always thought He went up on the mountainside just to make sure people didn't bother Him but. He had sent everyone away before He started praying. And so, I almost wonder if perhaps part of the reason Jesus went up on the mountainside to pray was so that He could keep a good lookout across the Lake at His friends and apparently He stopped at some point to look and saw them straining at the oars. And this is why I like Mark's account of the

story because it says “fourth watch of the night He came to them walking on the sea and would have passed them by” and I always thought that was one of the most hilarious verses in the Bible. You know, the disciples in the boat and Jesus just kind of ‘walking by’. But this verse makes you think that Jesus’ intent was really just to catch up with them. They had been going across the sea and instead of walking around the north end of the Lake, Jesus just said “Well, let’s just take the short cut and go across the water.” But by the time He caught up with them it was almost morning and maybe it was getting light and so they saw Him and they all freaked out and they cried out and they were terrified and that’s when Jesus stops, walks over to the boat and gets in and calms everything down.

You see, Jesus’ motivation in all of these things is not to get attention, it’s not to gather followers, it’s not to get fame and fortune and His name in lights, it’s not to have people go “wow, ooh, ahh, it’s not even to egg on the Pharisees and say, I bet you can’t do this. It’s not to impress people or to show off to people, the reason that Jesus does what he does is that all of these amazing miracles are not motivated by power or prestige or by profit, they are all motivated by the fact that Jesus cared for people. So He said “Hey guys, you look tired, let’s get in the boat and get away for awhile.” “Hey guys, these people are hungry, they need some food, let’s see if we can give them some.” “Hey guys, this is a little ironic, but you’re white as ghosts, how about I get in the boat and we’ll calm everything down.” “Hey guys, these people have been here for three days, they haven’t had a single thing to eat, we need to do something for them.” All of these things were motivated by the fact that Jesus cared for people. He cared for them when they were hungry, when they were tired, when they were afraid. And Jesus had compassion on people and it moved Him to help. Just like God always does.

The Psalmist says this is Psalm 103:8-13:

“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse nor will He harbor His anger forever. He does not treat us like our sins deserve nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the Heavens are above the Earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him. As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him”.

So whatever challenges you are facing, whatever situation you find yourself in, know this one thing for certain, God is motivated by His compassion and love for you.

But here’s what I find truly astounding about these stories. The reaction of the people to what they witness. We’ve already read through these things so I’ll skip through them fairly quickly. After the feeding of the 5,000, John’s account talks about the people who come to him and they say “What miraculous sign will you give us that we may see it and believe in you, what will you do?” After Jesus walks on water and He gets in the boat, the problem wasn’t that the disciples were scared because they thought they saw a ghost walking across the Lake, anyone would be scared at that. The problem comes that Jesus gets in the boat, the wind dies down and they’re

all completely amazed even though, last week Jesus had just calmed a great storm with three little words. Yet they are still amazed because their hearts were hardened. After the feeding of the 4,000 He got in a boat and came across the Lake the Pharisees began to question Him, they asked for a sign from Heaven and Jesus says “Why are you guys always asking for signs? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given”. And then He turned right around, got back in the boat and went back to the other side.

And it boggles my mind how after these completely astounding, amazing, unbelievable, miracles; after these tremendous displays of compassion that people would respond with doubt and belief. It’s almost as if there is this counter-beat to the Gospel of Mark. And as Mark is telling his story, he keeps going back and forth. An amazing thing happens. But why should we believe in you. An amazing thing happens. Give us a sign. An amazing thing happens. Prove you are really who you say you are. An amazing thing happens. Well I didn’t think you would be able to pull that off, Jesus. And it’s just back and forth, back and forth. Remember last week in Chapter 5, Jesus casts all these demons out of this guy and this guy who was crazy and possessed, self-mutilating and super-strong breaking chains and Jesus helps him and now he’s sitting down and he’s calm and he’s dressed and he’s got his hair combed and he’s shaved and he’s in his right mind. And people come along and they say “Wow! Now would you mind leaving please?” And Mark just keeps going back and forth and back and forth and it’s as if Mark is warning his readers, don’t just open up this book and read these stories and say “that’s amazing, that’s stupendous, that’s unbelievable, it’s incredible, it’s astounding, it’s....I wish there was someone who would help me. I wish there was someone who would comfort me. I wish there was someone who would watch over me. Save me.”

And Mark is writing at the top of his lungs saying “Remember The Stories!!!!, because that Jesus is our Jesus.” Sometimes I think we suffer from a terminal case of “what have you done for me lately?” And by lately, I mean in the last 10 or 15 minutes. How quickly we forget what God has done in the past to protect us and to sustain us and to heal us. But Mark challenges, let us be the ones who remember. Let us be the ones who share with each other the stories of God’s power. Let us be the ones who take refuge and comfort in the knowledge that God is motivated by His compassion and love for us. Let us be the ones who are daily blown away, that a God of such infinite and incredible power, is moved by our hurts and our needs and our struggles. Let us be the ones who follow the calling of the Psalmist who says: Psalms 105:1-5:

“Give thanks to the Lord. Call on His name. Make known among the nations what He has done. Sing to Him. Sing praise to Him. Tell of all His wonderful acts. Glory is His Holy Name. Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice, look to the Lord and his strength. Seek His face always. Remember the wonders He has done, His miracles, and the judgments He has pronounced.”