

**Mark 10: 17-31
Creekside COB
October 19, 2006**

“Love in Excess”

**I love little baby DUCKS, old pick-up TRUCKS, slow-moving
TRAINS,
and RAIN.
I love little country STREAMS, sleep without DREAMS, Sunday
school in May,
and HAY.
And I love you too.**

**I love LEAVES in the wind, PICTURES of my friends, BIRDS in
the world,
and SQUIRRELS.
I love COFFEE in a cup, little fuzzy PUPS, bourbon in a glass,
and GRASS.
And I love you too.**

**I love honest open SMILES, kisses from a CHILD, tomatoes on
the VINE,
and ONIONS.
I love WINNERS when they cry, LOSERS when they try, MUSIC
when it's good,
and LIFE.
And I love you too.**

**The country singer, Tom T. Hall expressed the loves of his life in
this song titled, “I Love.” It will not be remembered for its
eloquence or poetic lyrics. I doubt, however, that we could do
much better if we tried to compose verses about the loves that
matter deeply to us.**

If you had a sheet of paper with the heading, “I love....”, what would be on your list? What would it reveal about your priorities and values and faith? Not ranked in order of importance, my loves list includes: my family, fall, catching and eating fish, north woods sunsets, snow, chocolate, chocolate ice cream, and Chocolate Labradors, wildlife art, Christmas, football, nature, good friends, good stories, and good music. Oh... and I love you, too!

But love is such an over-used, threadbare word that means whatever people want it to mean. Love has been cut off from its God-source, strayed from its purposes, and replaced with trite clichés like, “*All you need is love,*” or “*Love means you’ll never have to say you’re sorry,*” or “*What’s love got to do with it?*” or “*Everybody get together and try to love one another right now.*” Tell me, have you tried to love someone? Jesus didn’t tell the disciples, “Just give loving each other a try. Lord knows I’ve tried loving you.”

Today is the third Sunday that the gospel text comes from Mark 10. It is our third look at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Today’s passage dispels the soft, shallow, syrupy notions of love that abound, and reveals an excessive sort of love that defines the direction of our discipleship.

It is a story that also appears in Matthew and Luke. Jesus is on the road—the road that will take him to Jerusalem, his crucifixion, and his death. Along the way he meets a man who has two things going for him—two things that people value. He is *young* and he is *rich*.

He kneels before Jesus and asks, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” It’s a BIG question. The question assumes that he has it within himself to gain eternal life. “What must “I” do?” With pen in hand, he is ready to record what Jesus is about to tell him, then go to work on it.

Jesus gave him a bodacious assignment that was nothing new. “If you want eternal life, keep the commandments. You know... don’t kill, don’t sleep with other men’s wives, don’t steal or lie,

and treat Mom and Dad with respect.” To Jesus surprise, the young man replied, “I’ve kept the commandments since I was a kid.” **“ALL OF THEM?”** Jesus asked. **“ALL OF THEM,”** he said. It was no small feat. We spend our lives struggling to remember the commandments, let alone abide by them all.

Here is where Mark includes a remark by Jesus not mentioned in either Matthew or Luke. *And Jesus looking upon him, loved him...* (10: 21). Why did Mark decide to include this detail? As children, we were taught that Jesus loves everyone. **“Red and yellow black and white they are precious in his sight.”** We’ve been told that the net Jesus’ casts is a big one—big enough to encircle all people in all circumstances in all times. But the love that Jesus has for the rich young man is love with a price tag on it.

Step back for a moment and consider this fellow. As a child he had perfect Sunday school attendance. He obeyed his parents and respected authority figures. He was responsible, trustworthy, and committed. He was a parent’s dream. He wasn’t satisfied with occasional successes. He wanted to be success story. He was an over-achiever. He applied the same dogged determination to his religious life. He was the kind of role model that children will imitate. He is the kind of person we would like to be.

We like this fellow, but Jesus didn’t. He loved him. He loved him enough to tell him what was missing. **“You lack only one thing. Sell everything you’ve got and give it to the poor. To get your treasure you’ve got to sell your treasure. Then, follow me.”** The meeting that began with such great promise suddenly turned south. He left with sorrow. His great possessions had a great hold on him. His quest for eternal life couldn’t over rule his wealth.

In his book, *Blue Like Jazz*, Don Miller talks about the years he spent thinking life was a story about him. It was easy to think this way because he was in every scene. He writes:

I was everywhere I went. If someone walked into my scene they were disrupting the general theme of the play, namely my comfort or glory... The most difficult lie I have ever contended with is this: life is a story about me... Addicts talk about the shakes and panic attacks and highs and lows resulting from their habit. I've had habits of my own, but no drug is so powerful as the drug of self.

The rich young man lived a comfortable, commendable life. But his attachment to his wealth and concern about "his" eternal life kept him from doing the necessary thing. "Sell your stuff. Give the proceeds to the poor. Follow me," Jesus said.

It is so hard to be a Christian in a world where there is such great greed and pursuit of personal pleasure. We are told that *we can have it all*, but Jesus whispers in our ears, "*I want it all.*" Like politicians who try to solve social ills by throwing money at the problems, we throw Jesus our money, or a couple hours of our Sunday morning, or we get involved in the business end of church, or spend more time reading the Bible, all of which is good, but we pull up short in relinquishing ourselves to his will.

"Jesus looked upon him and loved him." Jesus loved him too much to let him believe that eternal life is found by following a set of commandments. He loves us so much he wants our whole-hearted devotion-- when it's easy and when it's hard; when we are in the mood and when we're not

When I do pre-marital counseling couples I try to dispel the myth that love is a feeling. Romantic love rolls over us with waves of wonderful feelings that cause us to show our very best selves. The real test of love is after the romance phase when reality hits. She pouts. He's a grump. She's not much to look at in the morning. He's a slob. Mature love abides, whether it's easy or not; whether you *feel* loving or not-- for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do you part.

The rich man left Jesus without the thing he wanted most. He was a resourceful man who could have gotten along fine without all his possessions. He wasn't sure he could get along giving himself away. With his head hung low he walked away, and Jesus said, *"How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God."*

In his book, *Who Switched the Price Tags?*, Tony Campolo tells of the time when he and a boyhood friend broke into a neighborhood drug store. They weren't out to steal anything. They did it to pull a prank. They switched the price tags of expensive and inexpensive items. The next day some people got exceptional deals while others got ripped off. Radios sold for 10 cents. Paper clips cost \$50!

It's a parable of how the world attaches first-rate value to second-rate things. My desires are worth more than the needs of others. Comfort is worth more than compassion. A good income is worth more than a good name. Earthly treasure is more worth than treasure in heaven. The price tags have been switched!

A stockbroker had a dream in which he found a newspaper that wouldn't be printed for another year. He went straight to the stock reports to see the top performers. He was giddy with excitement at the prospect of buying a ton of stock, knowing in advance that it would produce a fortune. Then he turned the page and to his surprise, saw his own picture...on the obituary page. The dream put the price tags in order.

Suppose you stood before Jesus and asked Jesus about the cost of eternal life—what would he say to you? We think that Jesus is asking us to sell all we have, give it to the poor, and follow him. For you, the demand may be different. What keeps you from following Jesus? Money? The fear of losing something precious? The future you've planned for yourself?

Jesus' excessive love is a hard thing to receive. He wants us to do what he did for us. He wants us to give ourselves up. He said it's hard to get into the kingdom of God—as hard as threading a camel through a needle.

Tom Troeger wrote a hymn text that captures the resistance and rationalizing we do when Jesus calls us:

**If all you want, Lord, is my HEART, my heart is yours alone,
providing I may set apart my MIND to be my own.**

**If all you want, Lord, is my MIND, my mind belongs to you,
but let my HEART remain inclined to do what it would do.**

**If HEART AND MIND would both suffice, while I kept
STRENGTH and SOUL,
At least I would not sacrifice completely my CONTROL.**

**But since, O god, YOU WANT THEM ALL to shape with
your own hand, I pray for grace to heed your call to live
your first command.**

Jesus' asks a lot, but he promises a lot more.

**Don't make the mistake of walking away dejected, thinking that
your heart's desire is an impossible attainment. Jesus'
excessive love does what we cannot do. After Jesus told the
disciples how tough it is, they were bewildered and asked,
"Then who can be saved?" And Jesus replied, "With humans it
is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."**