

## Good...Better...Best...

✚ **Never let it rest... (vv.35-38)**

✚ **God can make it better... (vv.42-44)**

✚ **God makes better, best... (vv.45-49)**

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Lord, dear fellow lights reflecting Christ's Light:

Did your mother or grandma say things like this? "Good, better, best – never let it rest, 'til your good is better and your better, best." It's fine for loving parents and grandparents to help kids reach their potential. "Be All That You Can Be," said the Army, while the Marines just keep looking for "A Few Good Men." In most churches today, living up to your potential is as good as it gets.

But that's not good enough for God. He says, "*Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy*" (Leviticus 19:2). Skip Commandments 1-3, and you might think you're fine without murder, adultery or theft. "*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*" (1 Samuel 16:7) God expects beyond our best. His Eighth Commandment condemns gossip and listening to it. Evil desires God condemns in Commandments Nine and Ten. **Good...Better...Best...** – God's holiness can ...

✚ **Never let it rest... (vv.35-38)**


High school in the Dakotas, college in Wisconsin taught hard lessons. City slickers don't impress cowboys, and visa versa. Hat and boots in high school, okay, but not between Madison and Milwaukee. New job? New school? A "greenhorn" has so much to learn if you can just get past your pride.

Walking in the Wisconsin moonlight with my future bride, we heard the racing engine and spinning wheels of a pickup. A rope was tied to the rear bumper of a small car which a man was trying to jerk out of a ditch. Wonder the bumper didn't rip off. We tried to push, but the heavy front end kept sliding along the ditch deeper in the snow. Finally I asked to untie the rope and try something from the Dakota ranchers. Forward slow and easy. Don't spin your wheels. A little back, then forwards, then back again to start a track. Back and forth a little more, then give it just enough gas, and sure enough, the car drove right up onto the road. Give the young woman her keys and walk away smiling.

Is that not the story of our lives? Bigger engine, stronger rope, more people pushing, but all our best efforts just drag us deeper into the ditch. God demands first priority in our lives, but our hearts want sports, relationships, hobbies, anything but God. God commands us to keep His Name holy, but we can't pray the Lord's Prayer with total mind and heart. God expects us to sanctify the holy day by hearing His Word, but how often do we miss or let our minds wander when we're here? We cannot help ourselves. God hates sin. God hates sinners. He will punish all, especially the self-satisfied.

Meanwhile, man thinks he's so enlightened. Proudful human wisdom demands our own epiphany. "Maybe there's a resurrection, Paul, but *how are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?*" Hear echoes of today? "Explain the Bible to my satisfaction, or I just won't believe." And we slide a little deeper into the ditch. Charles Darwin lost a daughter, then demanded how an all-powerful God can allow suffering. Dust in the wind? "What kind of resurrected body will that be?"

*The wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."* (Isaiah 57:20f NIV) Yet God keeps working to give us rest in Him. Through Paul God says: "*How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.*" A wheat field looks nothing like wheat seed. **Never let it rest...** Give the keys to God because...

 **God can make it better... (vv.42-44)**

*“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”* The physical world of seeds and plants is a picture of the spiritual world of bodies resurrected.

To illustrate, think back to when churches used to always have a cemetery out back. In small towns of greater Minnesota you can still see them, sometimes with a sign that says, “God’s Acre.” What a great confession of faith! In Christian cemeteries the stones cry out in praise to God. At Trinity Lutheran Church, Hay Creek, Minnesota, three tiny stones mark the grief of Paul and Mary Cordes in the influenza epidemic of 1870. Three children in a few short months. What would make them rebuild a few miles away in West Florence and donate the land for another Trinity Lutheran Church with a cemetery for seven healthy children? Were they heart and soul with the woman who had “Hosea 6:2,3” chiseled in stone? *“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”*

Victorious lives like that are no accident. They’re not the product of human effort. They are gifts from our loving God who gives faith in Jesus to bring joy even through tears. Faith believes that day by day **God can make it better.** *“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5-7)* Past life’s little day...

 **God makes better, best... (vv.45-49)**

*“So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”*

The first man Adam had to learn the hard way that God will not accept second place in our lives. Satan’s lies could not change the fact that our Creator will not let anyone share His throne. God is love, absolute joy with no need of us. If we follow the rebellious fallen angel instead of Christ, God must finally say to us, “Thy will be done.” There is no life without God. There is no joy. All the ecstasy we could ever desire, and so much more beyond our wildest dreams comes only through the Second Adam, God’s own Son, shining as God during this Epiphany season. The Holy Spirit is restoring God’s holy image in us right now through Word and sacrament. On the other side, up there in glory with God, these bodies will bear the full likeness of Jesus’ glorified body – never able to get sick, not able to die.

Epiphany lights up our hope for glory everlasting with God. Listen how Martin Luther described this: *“So we must picture in our own hearts that when we are buried under the ground, we will come up again and grow into a new existence and everlasting life. We don't have to think of ourselves as dead and decaying, but rather as planted. We must learn a new way of speaking about death and the grave. When we die, it doesn't mean we are dead, but instead we are seeds planted for the coming summer. The cemetery is not a mound for the dead, but a field full of little seeds, which are called God's seeds. They will one day blossom again and become more beautiful than anyone can imagine.”*<sup>1</sup>

In the Light of Christ: **Good...Better...Best...Never let it rest...God can make it better... God makes better, best....** God has glorious plans for you far beyond the best healthcare. By His body and His blood we are at peace with God. Rest in Christ alone and shine to the glory of God. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther. *By Faith Alone*. © 1998, World Pub. Inc. DailyReader © 1999-2001, Wheeler, Rairdin. Licensed to Laridian. For the study behind this sermon or for copies email [m.cordes@comast.net](mailto:m.cordes@comast.net) . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church  
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