

Good, Better, Best.

Luke 10:38-41 with reference to Amos 8:1-12 & Colossians 1:15-28

July 2019

Amos 8:1-12 (ESV)

The Coming Day of Bitter Mourning

8 This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. ² And he said, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the LORD said to me,

“The end has come upon my people Israel;
I will never again pass by them.

³ The songs of the temple shall become wailing in that day,”
declares the Lord GOD.

“So many dead bodies!”

“They are thrown everywhere!”

“Silence!”

⁴ Hear this, you who trample on the needy
and bring the poor of the land to an end,

⁵ saying, “When will the new moon be over,
that we may sell grain?”

And the Sabbath,

that we may offer wheat for sale,
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great
and deal deceitfully with false balances,

⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals
and sell the chaff of the wheat?”

⁷ The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
“Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

⁸ Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who dwells in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,
and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of
Egypt?”

⁹ “And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD,
“I will make the sun go down at noon
and darken the earth in broad daylight.

¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning
and all your songs into lamentation;

I will bring sackcloth on every waist
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son
and the end of it like a bitter day.

¹¹ “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD
“when I will send a famine on the land—
not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.

¹² They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD
but they shall not find it.

Colossians 1:15-28 (ESV)

The Preeminence of Christ

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Paul's Ministry to the Church

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Luke 10:38-42 (ESV)

⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”



Intro:

I begin most Mondays with a morning run, breakfast, a prayer time and then make up a list. I set out what I am juggling at the moment. I prioritize and optimize.

- What must be done this week? = Needs
- What would I like to get to this week? = Wants
- What would be extra good to get to = Wishes.

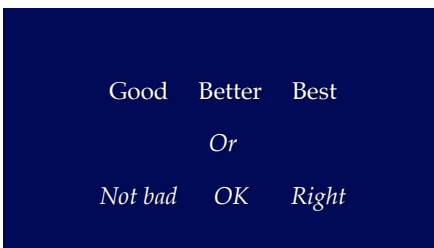
The week then unfolds according to those lists with interruptions along the way.

Sorting out priorities is very revealing and can be challenging. You may be familiar with the medical protocol of ‘triage’? You are bound to have seen it for real or in a movie.

In an emergency or war zone with multiple casualties the wounded and injured are assessed before being sent to hospitals for treatment.

As I understand it triage is about matching limited resources with the degree of urgency for treatment. In extreme conditions there are three basic assessments:

1. This person is injured but not critically. They will live.
2. This person is very badly injured and most likely will not survive.
3. This person is badly injured but can be saved if they get help soon. They get priority.



I doubt any of us are facing that level of decision in daily life but we might be faced with a different form of triage I set out as **Good, Better and Best**.

Other terms might be: **Not bad, OK and Right ?**

The world today faces some big questions where this applies and it swirls around us. One of the things I like about the Netherlands is the way this is often discussed and engaged.

- Protecting the environment and stabilizing the climate
- Maintaining economic growth
- Keeping jobs and Protecting living standards -- buying power
- Being internationally responsible.

This is being debated all the time. What is the #1 priority we can agree on?

I was 8 years old when the Apollo 13 crisis played out in space. The drama begins with: “Houston, we have a problem!” I remember those days when prayers being offered for the safe return of the crew. So when the movie came out I 1995 I was keen to see it.

There is a scene which illustrates what I am talking about well. *The YouTube link is in the footnotes*. Everyone soon recognizes that the loss of oxygen in space is a very serious problem and that Apollo 13 has become a rescue mission.

A dozen engineers gather in a situation room and for a few moments everyone is talking at once until one engineer named 'John', breaks through and gets everyone's attention. He says: "Power is everything, without it nothing happens."¹ At that point everyone clicked and aligned.

Others had been focused on communications, navigation and control systems but the key issue was how many amps they had available for how long. Focused on that fact they began working on getting the astronauts back.

Power was the Best and the Right thing to be focused on.

Jesus said similar things. Talking about God's reign he said in Matthew 6 about not being anxious:

Matthew 6 25-33
²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ...
³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Then when talking about how we his followers are to relate to each others he gave what we call 'the great commandment' that prioritized love in John 15.11-12.

John 15.11-12
¹¹ ... I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

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¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

St Paul echoes Jesus here in 1 Corinthians 12:30b:

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

What follows is chapter 13.

What sets **Good, Better and Best** up for us as Jesus followers is alignment with Jesus on these issues.

We have some critical reference points:

- Is this inline with God's reign in my life and the world as Jesus demonstrated?
 - If not it may be OK or sort of 'good' but not the best.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tid44iy6Rjs>

- Is this loving of the brothers and sisters as I am called to love as we are loved in Jesus.
 - Love is Jesus' way so that's the standard.

Text:

So with this in mind I want to scan this morning's readings as illustrations:



Amos was the first writing prophet working about 800 BC. He is telling the people of Northern Israel that the judgment is coming because they are not living in alignment with the core values of God their covenanted King.

God wants a just society with fair economics and social righteousness.

This was a time when business and religion were booming.

Economic prosperity had been made the greatest the greatest good and the best. Religion was doing well too. Worship was popular and people enjoyed it.

Meanwhile,

Amos was aware that traders were tinkering with the scales used to buy and sell.

that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great
and deal deceitfully with false balances,
6 that we may buy the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals
and sell the chaff of the wheat?"

Archeology of this period has provided an illustration of this. A house was found with two sets of scales that did not agree. I suspect one was for selling and one for buying?

As for adding dust or plastic to add bulk to food, that still happens today.

The result of all this was economic hardship and poverty for the vulnerable in society.

The warning from God through Amos was that just as summer comes to an end, God would enact the covenant sanctions to bring all this to an end by bringing to nothing the values that the Northern Kingdom had put in wrong priority.

If economy is the 'Best', with Religion considered 'Better' while Justice and Mercy are 3rd ranked as a nominal 'Goods', guess what will happen?

Relates to VOC motto: "Jesus is Good Trade is better"

What Amos saw in Israel contrasted to what Jesus would say 800 years later:

"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

In case you don't know, The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians who took the population away into captivity. The writings of Amos written before this happened explain why God allowed this to happen. It was a matter of priorities.

The Epistle reading today from **Colossians** is just excellent and about the Best of the Best.

Scholars think this is actually a hymn or song about Christ:

Colossians 1:15-20
¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

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This worshipful and wonderful appreciation of Christ declares him paramount, prior to all, the first among all. Having celebrated the very Best, Paul goes on to describe how both he and his readers live in and for Christ as The Best. All other things are to find their place in reference to him ‘that in everything he might be preeminent.’

Then in the Gospel we come down to earth to a conversation we know well, that swirls around ‘Living-room-Mary’ as ‘Kitchen-Martha’ and Jesus sort out priorities.



As I was raised in the 70s and 80s so let me put it as a feminist question:

Q Where is the best place for a woman?

Mary and Martha were not 20th century feminists but they were hitting something familiar from very different angles.

Q Does the man Jesus and his entourage need a good meal or should we listen to him first and think about eating later?

That question is still relevant. Jesus’ answer is timeless.

A “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴²but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Until **Good, Better, Best** are clearly resolved there is potential for a divided mind.

This is the cause of worry as one part of us fights another part of us so we get tired and stressed.

I suspect Martha wanted to be in two places.

- Hospitality is Good,
- Listening to Jesus is Good too,
 - Which is better?

She opted for practical hospitality but it did not sit peacefully with her especially when her sister Mary opted for listening to Jesus as better than practical hospitality.

I wonder if Jesus might say something similar to many women today;

“you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary.”

Q What is Best?

A If you trying to keep a job or advance a career, raise children, make ends meet, keep in touch with family around the world, be involved in church and have some time for yourself. You just might become anxious and troubled about many things?

Mary shows the way in choosing the ‘good portion’ which will not be taken away.

Meanwhile men typically have a less multi-task view on life but not always. We also have the same need to prioritize and focus.

Conclusion:

I would like to suggest that somewhere in the summer holiday you look at what you want to designate as **Good, Better and Best** in your life.

For Jesus followers and God worshippers ‘Best’ needs to be what Mary modeled and Jesus applauded. It’s looking to him, listening to him as the key-note of God’s kingdom that we are to seek first.

The harder exercise is demoting things that should be more like good or better and maybe not even that.

This is the business of ordering our lives which is a discipleship exercise.