

# *Preaching to Lucy and Ethel*

**“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?  
Hear...that your soul may live.” (from Isaiah 55)**

**A sermon about pastors and their people**

**How can I describe the ministry of a pastor? In a way, it's like preaching to Lucy and Ethel.** Do you remember the “I Love Lucy Show?” In one of the many classic scenes from that great TV series, Lucy and Ethel are working in a candy factory. Their job is to process the candy that comes to them on the conveyor belt. The work starts out OK but, as you remember, the candy starts coming faster and faster and Lucy and Ethel find it harder and harder to keep up. Work as hard as they do, those sweet things are coming at them too fast. So they stuff them in their pockets. They stuff them in their blouses. They stuff them in their mouths. They get so frustrated that they even throw the candy at each other. All that work and they still can't keep up. With that picture in mind, let me tell you why I think the ministry is a lot like preaching to Lucy and Ethel.

Laypeople, please, don't take what I just said as an insult. I certainly don't mean it to be. **The truth is we ministers are Lucies and Ethels too. We all are. It's human nature that we work hard and long for ourselves and for our families and...we still can't keep up.** We work long hours to get our paycheck. We worker longer hours to get overtime. We go to bed thinking about how we can do this or how we can do that. We lie awake worrying about what we'll do. Sometimes we wake up feeling like there's an anvil on our chest. How am I going to deal with all that's coming my way? All this work, all this effort to stuff the good things in our lives. Now comes God... Now comes God and says...and this is the text...from Isaiah 55: ***Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?*** That's what God says to all of us, lay people and ministers, to all of us who work so hard to stuff the good things into our lives.

In our distinction of clergy and laity and especially in the honor we pay to our faithful pastors, **we easily forget that God is the minister. God is the minister who serves His good things to all of us.** You weren't baptized by Rev. So and So. He may have said the words and applied the water but you were really baptized by God. You aren't communed by Rev. So and So. He may give you the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ but it's really God who's communing you. You better hope that no minister ever gives you his “good news.” No, it's the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is to be preached on Sundays and that comes from God. God is the One who serves us with good words. ***Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, you're your soul may live.***

The conveyor belt of life throws so much at us. Yes, we have to respond. We have to try and deal with it. That's all well and good. God hasn't taken us to heaven yet because He wants us to respond to all the challenges that come our way. We're not saved by our good works but there are good works that we all should be doing. **The trouble comes, and it always does, when the sin that is deep in us makes us think that all our doing, all our stuffing, is the way we can get the most important job of all done. That most important job is to present ourselves to God in a way that is acceptable to Him.** If that's going to happen, it won't happen because of our strivings, as good and laudable as they may be. If you're going to be acceptable to God

it'll only happen because God has put His saving words of Jesus Christ into your hearts. His words do what your striving and stuffing cannot. His words are so much sweeter than anything that the conveyor belt of life brings our way. *Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28). *Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst* (John 4:14). *I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry* (John 6:35). *Hear...that your soul may live.*

William Barclay was a Scottish theologian, who lived from 1907-1978. He told this story.

*I was sitting in my club yesterday when a man I do not know came up to me and asked me about a certain famous preacher and theologian. He told me that he had been a regular army officer, and that on Sunday mornings when he found himself posted anywhere near, he used to slip away to hear this preacher.*

*Once he took his little niece along with him – about ten years of age. When they came out of the church, his first question was: 'Well, what did you think of that minister?' 'Terrific,' came the surprising answer. 'I had two sweeties with me in my pocket, and I clean forgot to eat them!'*

*That is just about the best compliment I have ever heard to a preacher.*

**“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear.”** That’s what makes a good sermon and a good pastor, the totally captivating ministry of God through His Gospel. We get so caught up in personalities in our world and church, focusing more on Lucies and Ethels than on God who gives us the best things of all. ***Hear...that your soul may live.*** *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. I shall not want.* (Psalm 23:1). We have enough condemnation in this world and often in religion. How often don’t we act like Lucy and Ethel and in our frustrations start hurling accusations and judgment at one another? How welcome are the words of Jesus Christ. ***Hear...that your soul may live.*** *There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). We have so much death and hurt in this world. ***Hear...that your soul may live.*** *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live* (John 11:35). So laypeople listen to the words their pastors speak, and the pastors should be listening to those words as well. *He that hears you hears Me* (Luke 10:16). Jesus’ words are weekly reminders that all our strivings and all our stuffings may be necessary but they are not necessary to stand confidently before God. Jesus Christ is our confidence before God and the faith and hope and love that are in Jesus Christ give meaning to all our labors in life. The best thing all us Lucies and Ethels can do is chuckle at ourselves...and fill ourselves with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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