



Dr. James C. Howell
Acts 2:1-13; Proverbs 2:1-15, 3:1-10
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The day of confirmation, the day of Pentecost, a day for wisdom. We have mistaken the gift of the Holy Spirit in the modern American church. We think that God gives us the spirit so we will have some kind of emotional experience, but actually, through the history of the church, the greatest, noblest, the most primal gift that people expected from the presence of the Holy Spirit was wisdom. Wisdom. We do not speak much of wisdom. We talk a lot about being smart. We talk a lot about success. Wisdom. Wisdom. The passage that we have just heard has a number of sentences that bear some reflection. I am going to choose a few. You can go home and reflect on some others yourself, later. The passage in Proverbs says, "Honor the Lord with your substance."

I love the word confirmation. We associate it with what we do once a year, and it is a huge day and our parents are duly proud and it's great. It is great for the life of the church, but the word confirmation, the rest of your life, comes when you are on the phone and you've made a phone order and somebody on the other end says, "Would you want to write down your confirmation number?" I never really want to do it. I figure I'm going to lose it, but I do because I might need that thing one day. You order an airline ticket and you print out your what? Confirmation of your order. What is a confirmation? A confirmation is something that you produce to prove that something that already exists really is. A confirmation is something that you produce to prove that something that already exists really is. I think that is perfect for what confirmation is about. We say that God exists. We say that we have faith in God, but what is the confirmation? What is the proof that we would produce?

I love what Albert Schweitzer said. He was teaching New Testament at the University of Strasburg early in the 20th Century. He was a world-class organist. He was a great physician. He must have been just annoyingly brilliant. I thought that was a funny line, annoyingly brilliant. As he talked about Jesus in his classes, he found it was no longer sufficient just to talk about Jesus. He thought he had to do something, so he left his amazing life in Europe and went to the middle of nowhere in Africa and became a doctor to the poorest of the poor who had no one else to care for them. The reason he did this, he said, was "I decided to make my life my argument. I would advocate the things I believed in terms of the life I lived and what I did."

Brothers and sisters, today we invite all of us to a confirmation, to make our lives our argument, to make our lives the confirmation of what already exists. Proverbs continues and says, "In all your ways acknowledge him. Honor the Lord with all your produce." It is interesting, the word, all. In all your ways. Not some of your ways, but in all your ways acknowledge Him. Honor the Lord not with some of your substance, but with all of your substance. I recently read a book that somebody gave me called *The Hole in The Gospel*. It is written by Richard Stearns, who is head of World Vision. In it, he says the following: "God doesn't ask for mere church attendance and a few prayers, belief or even some self-denial. God asks us for everything. Not just a personal relationship with God, but a public one as well."

Personal faith with no outward expression has a hole in it.” Then he clenches his argument by quoting an unassailably, flawless authority. He does what I always think is great. He quotes a country singer. To me, this is the height of intellectual brilliance. He turns to Johnny Cash. Johnny Cash sang – I guess Johnny Cash sang, you always wonder if he was able to hit a pitch – Johnny Cash sang, “You’re so heavenly minded, you’re no earthly good.” You’re so heavenly minded, you’re no earthly good. The wise do not wish to have a hole in their faith. They wish for it not to be just personal, but also public.

Here is something else in Proverbs that is really hard to talk about. God is a shield to those who walk in integrity. Discretion will guard you, delivering you from those who delight in what is perverse. No one talks much about integrity anymore. No one talks much about discretion anymore, but we hear plenty from those who delight in what is perverse, and we have to think of new words all the time to explain the phenomena that we discover in our society. I learned a word recently. The word is sexting. Sexting. You have to use your imagination on this. I am barely catching up to texting. Texting. My children have telephones, but they do not speak into their telephones, they type into their telephones. I don’t get that. They type into their telephones and that is called texting, but every good thing can be perverted, can it not? And now we have sexting. Sexting. The wise wish to have integrity. The wise care about discretion, laughable, as it may seem in our society. Flannery O’Connor wrote a wonderful short story where there were two teen-age girls in school and one of their teachers is an elderly former nun, and the nun begins to give them some counsel one day. She says the most effective ways to repel the advances of a young man in the back seat of the car is to say, “Stop, sir, I am a temple of the Holy Ghost,” and the girls laughed, too, and in fact they picked up on this and they began to call each other, sort of on the analogy of Dr. Seuss, “Thing One and Thing Two,” they called each other Temple One and Temple Two. They would pass each other in the hall and they would say, “Hi, Temple One,” and the other one would say, “Hi, Temple Two,” and then they would just laugh uproariously. Isn’t it interesting that we find it to be funny that we would say, “Stop sir, I am a temple of the Holy Spirit?” Whether we think it is funny or not, each one of us in this room is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We are not trying to sound prudish or boring, but the fact is God made us to be holy, to have integrity, to exercise discretion. This is the life of wisdom. Proverbs continues and says, “Let us be attentive to wisdom. Seek it like silver.” Notice it does not say, “Seek silver.” It says, “Seek wisdom like silver.” We know all about seeking silver. The world tells you all day long how to seek silver: Go after it. In the church, I always hate it that we have this task, as people always get annoyed with me and your eyes glaze over. I know, I know, I know, but when I warn you about the dangers of wealth, this isn’t a James Howell thing, this is the Scriptures. This is the history of Christianity. G.K. Chesterton was absolutely right when he said, “There is one thing that Christ and all the Christian saints have said when they sort of savage monotony.” They have said simply that to be rich is to be in peculiar danger of moral wreck. Young people, the world will tell you how to seek silver, but in the church we want to tell you how to seek wisdom like silver. If you do not believe money is dangerous, just open the newspaper any day, and there is always a story of corruption somewhere, everywhere, and it is always tied to money. Show me some corruption out there that has not got money tied to it. What people won’t do for money, and I love that phrase: What people won’t do for money. They will do anything for money, and what I wonder is, what if we had that attitude about wisdom? There is nothing I won’t do for wisdom.

And then finally, there is this; Proverbs says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart." Thomas Merton for awhile was living in a monastery in the middle of nowhere in Kentucky and he said, "This is the most important place in America." Now people may laugh at that idea, but what he thought about was this: In a monastery, what happens is they get up every morning and they pray all day long, and somebody prays all night long, and he said, "Because of this, this is the most important place in America." Not Wall Street, not Washington, not Madison Avenue, not Hollywood, but a monastery. This is the most important place in America. I sent some money to a monastery out in Colorado a few years ago as kind of a memorial gift in honor of the memory of someone, and as you can imagine, this has put me permanently on their fund-raising list. Every month, they send me something in the mail asking me for money, but I don't mind because the first time I sent them money, on the little form where you send in money, they ask you, "Is there anybody that you would have us to pray for 24 hours a day?" I put the names of three people on there. Every month when they send me a note asking for money, they say, "We are still praying for..." and they name those three people. The last piece of mail they sent me had a little reflection about what the monks do. It said at midnight, at midnight when the factory machines are still running, when crimes readily occur, when nurses are working in hospital wards but most of us are asleep, at midnight, the monk wakes to love a God who is forgotten by humanity. At midnight, the monk brings the troubles of our world to the depths of God's mercy. The most important place in the world is the place where people come and bring the troubles of the world before God's mercy.

There is more that I could say, but we need to proceed with the service, confirmation. It is a lovely day. Let me urge all of us to a life of wisdom, that our lives may be the confirmation of the God who truly exists, and that we learn somehow to turn off the TV, don't run so many errands, take some time to reflect over the word of God and even to pray, and if you do this, you will discover that wherever you are is, in fact, the most important place in America. Thanks be to God. Amen.