

Sermon ☩ May 23, 2021

Acts 2:1-21

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My Dad used to invest in the stock market not a lot ... but enough. And sometimes things went his way ... (once he was very fortunate) ... but most of the time he might have been better off planting the money in our backyard and waiting for it to grow.

For many of us, the world of stocks and bonds and commodities is *literally* another world. But I would like to use the notion of investment as a way of illustrating the subject of the Holy Spirit.

Today is Pentecost. This is traditionally the time when we try to figure out anew what the Holy Spirit is all about.

I, personally, find it a lot easier to talk about Jesus or even God than I do the Holy Spirit. God and Jesus are a part of a story that can be told and retold. But the Holy Spirit is not easily captured by a story; the Spirit is a presence . . . a phenomena. In this sense, the archaic words *Holy Ghost* are revealing. There is a mysteriousness about the Spirit of God.

In doing some reading the other day, I came across an old article written by a financial analyst with the Ford Motor Company. The article was titled, "*God as the Ultimate Portfolio Manager*".

The author put forth an interesting analogy for what the Holy Spirit is all about in our lives. His theory was that human beings are a form of *investment* for God. God "invests" in us and hopes for some sort of a favorable return on this investment. Like most analogies, this one isn't perfect . . . but it does offer a refreshing viewpoint.

Just as we might put money into a company by buying stock, God invests in us by putting the Holy Spirit into us. And just as we look for a high rate of return on our investment, God expects, I would think, at least a reasonable rate of return from each human *share*.

How are we aware of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is not a constant . . . it is a variable in our lives. The Spirit cannot be measured or predicted or entrapped. Like the fluctuations of the stock market, the movement of the Holy Spirit is unfettered and unpredictable.

American author and columnist, Stewart Alsop, died 47 years ago this coming Wednesday after a long battle with leukemia. By his own admission, Alsop was not a very devout Christian. In 1973, he wrote a book entitled, *Stay of Execution* which chronicled his fight with cancer. At one point Alsop discussed with his doctor the *variables* of his disease . . . things which might affect the disease (flu, skin diseases, rashes).

After a lengthy conversation, Alsop told his physician that there was one variable he kept leaving out. "*What is that?*", asked the doctor. "*God,*" replied Alsop. The doctor and patient both smiled at each other, and the episode was ended.

Reflecting on all of this, Alsop later wrote: *"I don't really believe in God, or at least I don't think I do, and I doubt if my doctor does...but I think we both had at the back of our minds the irrational notion that God might have something to do with what happened all the same."* The Holy Spirit is here whether or not we believe in it; and the Spirit is not limited by our recognizing it.

Again, the Holy Spirit is not a constant and it requires a perpetual series of revivals. Thomas Merton said something about the Holy Spirit in the church when he wrote that the tradition: *". . . is handed down from generation to generation, but it must reach each one of us brand new or not at all. If it is merely tradition and not news, it has not been preached or not heard . . ."* The Spirit of God cannot be so fixed, so determined, so rigid that it can never be anything new, unpredictable or astonishing.

There is a story of a young clergyman who was sent to a small town in Scotland to be the new preacher. He was to take the place of an old man who had been minister in the village for many years.

Upon his arrival and hoping to be complimentary, the young minister says to the well-seasoned older pastor, *"I will begin where you left off."* The old man thought a while and then spoke out of his wisdom, *"No, my son, you will begin where I began."*

The Holy Spirit is perpetually new; it cannot be handed down from generation to generation. The Holy Spirit was sent to this world on that strange day of Pentecost over 2,000 years ago. That's when God made the initial investment. It's been a fluctuating market ever since.

The Holy Spirit enters into life and death situations, an unknown quantity whose power to change and renew and heal has been a factor in Christian life for centuries. And we have to stay awake to be aware of this presence to daily rediscover the possibility of the Spirit.

Finally, the Holy Spirit keeps some pressure on us. God demands a reasonable return of this investment in each of us. T.S. Eliot put it well when he wrote: *"Of course there's something in us, in all of us which isn't just heredity, but something unique. Something we have been from eternity. Something . . . straight from God."*

And that, my friends, is what we call the Holy Spirit. Amen.

