

(ethereal choral music)

- Good morning. Welcome to Duke University Chapel for this service of worship. We've been lead in worship by our guest choir from Towson State, the Towson State University Chorale was joining the Duke Chapel choir for this service and we are happy to have these talented young musicians with us. Our choir has just returned from a wonderful trip to England singing in various cathedrals there over the winter break. And we welcome them back for this service as well. At five o'clock this afternoon, there will be a organ recital, free, open to the public here in the chapel. Today is part of a 20-year tradition here at Duke University of inviting public officials, elected officials of our state to be our guest for this service. And we welcome these special guests, guest of our president who serves as the elector for this service. We hope the service will be, for our elected officials, a time of rededication, of strength and inspiration and for all of us, a time to ponder our responsibility to civic righteousness. You will note that today's Psalm 19 speaks of the law and the way of the Lord. The anthem during the offering is coordinated with the song. The last hymn speaks of Christ as light of the world. Our musicians have planned it such as a time of renewal and rededication for each of us. And now, let us stand for the call to worship. The grace our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- The splendor of Christ shines upon us.

Congregation: Praise the Lord. (organ music) (all singing "O Splendor of God's Glory Bright") (organ music) (all singing "O Splendor of God's Glory Bright")

- Let us pray. Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known. And from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and wordily magnify your holy name, amen. You maybe seated.

- Let us pray together the Prayer for Illumination.

All: Open our hearts and minds, Oh God, by the power of your Holy Spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us this day, Amen.

- The Old Testament reading is taken from the book of Nehemiah, Chapter Eight. "All the people gathered together "into the square before the water gate. "They tell the scribe Ezra "to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, "which the Lord has given to Israel. "Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought "the law before the assembly, "both men and women and all "who could hear with understanding. "This was on the first day of the seventh month. "He read from it, facing the square before the water gate "from early morning until midday, "in the presence of the men and women "and those who could understand. "And the ears of all the

people "were attentive to the Book of the Law. "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, "for he was standing above all the people. "And when he opened it, all the people stood up. "Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, "and all the people answered, 'Amen, amen,' "lifting up their hands. "Then they bowed their heads "and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- Today's psalm is number 19, versus seven to 10, found on page 751 of the hymnal. Please stand and sing the psalm and gloria responsively. (organ music) ♪ The law of the Lord is perfect ♪ ♪ Reviving the soul ♪ ♪ The testimony of the Lord is strong ♪ ♪ Making wise and simple ♪ ♪ The precepts of the Lord are right ♪ ♪ Rejoicing the heart ♪ ♪ The commandment of the Lord is pure ♪ ♪ Enlightening the eyes ♪ ♪ The fear of the Lord is clean ♪ ♪ Enduring forever ♪ ♪ The ordinances of the Lord are true ♪ ♪ And righteous all together ♪ ♪ More to be desired are they than God ♪ ♪ Even much fine gold ♪ ♪ Sweet drops of that honey ♪ ♪ And drippings of the honeycomb ♪ ♪ All glory be to you Creator ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ our savior ♪ ♪ And to the Holy Spirit ♪ ♪ Blessed is he ♪ ♪ As it was at time began ♪ ♪ It's now and will be ♪ ♪ Forever more ♪ (soft organ music) (choir singing in foreign language)

- The gospel reading today is from The Book of Luke, Chapter 10. "Jesus said, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem "'to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers "'who stripped him, beat him, and went away "'leaving him half-dead. "'Now, by chance, a priest was going down that road. "'And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. "'So, likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place "'and saw him, passed by on the other side. "'But a Samaritan, while traveling, came near him. "'And when he saw him, he was moved with pity. "'He went to him and bandaged his wounds, "'having poured oil and wine on them. "'Then he put him on his own animal, "'brought him to an inn "'and took care of him. "'The next day, he took out two denari "'and he gave them to innkeeper and said, ""Take care of him and when I come back, ""I will repay you, whatever more you spend."" This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- At the conclusion of the Martin Luther King Day service here this past week, having conversation with a student. And we were talking about what a good observance it had been. And then she said, "Of course, I don't know "that anything has really changed in race relations "in America over the past 20 years, fundamentally. "I don't believe I, as one person, "can do much about it." And the next day reading in "The Journal of Higher Education" there was a report on the annual nationwide freshman survey, which reported that student political interest, political interest and knowledge in this year's freshman class across the country is at the lowest ebb in the 29-year history that the freshman survey has been taken. We're in an apolitical time. The robbery was captured on the convenience store's TV camera. Shortly after midnight, a stickup man had entered the convenience store, pointed the gun at the woman behind the counter, a mother who had just put her two children to bed a couple of hours before. She complied with his demand. He looked at the money, he pointed the gun back at her, and he shot her dead. Random cruelty. Pointless violence on a nameless night in North Carolina. And I, watching this on the evening news, took the remote control of the TV, punched it. And in just a few minutes I could no longer see the calm killing in Carolina. And

I thought of that episode with myself upon seeing this Sunday's gospel, the familiar story, the gospel, the good Samaritan. 'Cause that's how that story begins as well. It begins with a random act of violence, an anonymous act of violence. Jesus doesn't tell us the name of the man who is attacked by robbers and beaten and stripped and left half-dead in the ditch. He's simply one more anonymous victim. You've seen it on the evening news. You have heard the story before, a story to which you and I have become comfortably accommodated. Jesus doesn't say that they robbed the man, though that's a safe assumption. It's interesting the words he uses. He says they "beat him and they stripped him." And if you have ever been the victim of some anonymous act of crime, that's how you say it feels. You feel stripped, violated, your dignity peeled away, stripped. We're told that the man lies in the ditch stripped, and in Jesus' words "half-dead." His story has not yet ended, but it is at least half-ended. Last year, 2,000 New Yorkers ended their life story at the hands of fellow New Yorkers. Over 300 cab drivers in New York took their last ride last year, victims of this random, anonymous violence. And so, we're justified at this point in the story, for assuming with what we know, that this is his last ride for the man who went from Jerusalem down to Jericho and fell among thieves. But no. By chance, a priest was going down that same road. The man lying in the ditch has had all of his options stripped from him. There's nothing he can do of his own accord to keep this story going. He lies there, helpless, half-dead. And so, now, this one coming down the road, whether he knows it or not, has responsibility for whether this story's going to continue, whether this man will live or die. And when he saw him, yes, Jesus says he "sees him." There was maybe that split second when he wishes that he had not seen this pitiful, bleeding sight in the ditch. But no, he saw. And he passed by on the other side. And all potentialities and possibilities end. As he not only passes by the pitiful sight in the ditch, but he passes by, in Jesus' words, "on the other side." His journey continues on the other side. Now, please do not read into this story, though you probably already are, reasons why this priest passed by on the other side. It's interesting. Jesus gives us no reasons. As a priest, he knew the Hebrew law against defilement with a corpse. Maybe it was some sort of religious problem. Those who had jumped the man who is now lying in the ditch might be lying in wait for another traveler as well. A bloody body is revolting. I don't think Jesus gives any reasons for this priest avoidance, 'cause he doesn't need to. Without much creativity or imagination, we quickly supply our own reasons. Yes, they're our reasons. Reasons that any of us have used on similar occasion. Is there anyone here who has not averted the eyes, not passed by on the other side for a host of perfectly understandable good reasons? Here at the university, we are in the reason business. And by such reasons, evil continues, insisting on having the last word in this story because you will note that the last real action in this story, the last act of human creativity, has been on the part of the robbers who stripped and left the man half-dead. Evil rules in this story. But, wait. By chance, another man was coming down the road. And, fortunately, this time, not a member of the clergy. But he passes by on the other side. He also, this second man, bears responsibility for intervention. He has in his hands the potential to make a difference in the way this story is running. And yet, when he sees the wounded man, he also passes by on the other side. And wouldn't we all? I mean, what difference can one person make? There is a kind of fear of contamination with those who suffer. I've seen it in my own congregation. Somebody, say, is fired from his job. And people will avoid that person like he's got some kind of communicable disease. We don't wanna catch whatever it is he got. If he had played the game right in our country and kept his nose to the grindstone and done right, he wouldn't be in this fix. We don't want to touch him. There is this sort of irrationality, which bubbles forth at these moments. Powerful, irrational fear, all the more powerful because of its irrationality, that we need to distance ourselves, we need to go over to the other side. When random cruelty breaks forth, we pass by. One

man down the road, another man down. But a third man, a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And we've heard this story before. We've seen two people pass by. Jesus, the story is getting tiresome. It's becoming redundant. What's the point of repeating it again? Let the story, let this age-old story of the triumph of evil be done, the omnipotence of violence. But, a third man, surprise. Jesus says, "And when he saw him, "he stopped and he went to him." And it's interesting. Just as Jesus does not speculate upon the motives of the men who did not stop, so he now fails to speculate on the motives of the man who did stop. He touches the victim, he cleans his wounds, he binds them, sets him on his own beast. He takes care. The man who was so brutally beaten cannot continue his story. He is powerless to continue the journey, if not for this Samaritan who chose to intersect his life journey with that of the unfortunate man. By his act, the man once stripped is able to live. The story continues. And the next day, the Samaritan takes his money, the equivalent of two day's wages and gives it to the innkeeper saying, "Take care of him. "Anything you spend, I will repay "when I come back this way." This third man risk. He stops, he detours. He extravagantly responds to the needs of this anonymous stranger. He becomes the voice of the victimized, speaking for the man in the ditch who never utters a word in the entire story. Now, as preacher, I have always been curious that God never appears in this story of the good Samaritan. If you know some of the other stories of Jesus, some of Jesus' parables, Jesus tells most of his parables, they're stories about God, about the nature of God, the kingdom of God. But here, this story is all about us. I told you it was story about violence, a man in the ditch beaten, left black and blue, death hovering, vulture-like, ready to pounce and end this story. And we wish Jesus had offered some reason for the violence. Pin it on poverty or class resentment, a lack of a good educational system, injustice. We just grope for reasons. In one of Margaret Atwood's stories "Surfacing," one of Atwood's characters says that she always reads detective novels, because unlike in life, in detective novels, death is logical. There's always a reason. Before you end the story, you always get a motive. But Jesus attributes no motive to the robbers brutality. This is violence at its worst, random, senseless, inexplicable, street crime, that which opinion polls say bothers us Americans the most. Jesus doesn't say that they were victims of poverty, thus explaining the robbery. He doesn't say that they were abused as children, thus giving a nice adult explanation for their adult violence. This is the worst kind of evil. It's random, it's senseless, it's anonymous. Such evil bubbles up and throws into chaos our very lives, calls into question the whole point of the world and the meaning of our existence. And so, we grope for reasons. Finding no reason, we just scurry by on the other side. Recently, a German scholar friend visiting the United States, on his way back I ask him, "What has been your impression of American society "these past couple of months here?" And he said to me, (speaking German). "I'm surprised "how much poverty and how much social hopelessness "Americans are willing to accept as normal." We Americans living in the most violent society in the world have learned stoically to accept stories of violence. This fall we reached the one million mark in the number of incarcerated citizens. But the teller of this tale is not the stoic Marcus Aurelius. It is Jesus. Surprise. A third man comes down the road and the story continues. And we here whisper the possibility that death might not end the story, that evil might not have the final word. Oh, I wish I could get you to believe that story. Two men came down the road and assumed that violence, death had the last word, that their actions count for nothing, that the world cannot be modified through their effort. By avoiding the man in the ditch, they conferred absolute omnipotence on evil, the power of the present darkness. What can anybody do? And politics dies. The third man, you will note, is not much of a philosopher. He is not a sociologist or psychologist. The third man, I think is, I think he's a politician. He sees, he stops. He's an activist. He binds, he cares, he gives, he takes time. If you'll notice, he gets most of

the verbs in the story. He refuses to bow to the power that has so disempowered the beaten man. In this story, evil is real and it is bloody. But it is not, in this story by Jesus, the last word. And we aren't told whether the wounded man recovered. Even if he didn't recover, would that detract in any way from our wonder at the third man who stops and reaches out? The intrusive power of him to insert himself into the life of this person he doesn't even know and thus change the course of the story to rich possibility out of the jaws of death. Nothing is papered over here. Death is not logical. Victims of random violence may recover. They may go down the road again but they now travel with scars. As a woman of my acquaintance who was raped said to me, "You get up, you stand up, you go on, "but you still cry sometimes." There's no Pollyana assurance here that everything is going to turn out all right. Evil is real. But, it need not have the last word. So, I ask you a question, which I believe meant by this story. And the question is this. What is real? Does death have the last word in our state or is it life? Walking down roads, each of us must make a decision about that. Who names North Carolina not to decide, not to act, to move to the other side is to decide. The third man, the Samaritan, stops and in stopping he is free as an untethered expression of life, as an overflowing of his own vitality, and clinch-fisted determination not to let evil have the last word. Oh, I know you can read the story otherwise. You can read it as an illustration that the man in the ditch is a victim of meaningless violence, therefore life is meaningless, therefore the prudent person always steps to the other side with our burglar alarms and our insurance and our dispassionate academic explanations. Two people come down the road, the majority of average Americans pass by on the other side. You will note that it is the minority, only one out of three, who is free, gifted, overflowingly confident in his God-given ability to make a difference in the story. Here is the foundation of all society worthy of the name. In "The Brothers Karamasov," Dmitri has been a victim. He's been falsely accused of the death of his father. He's brutally interrogated by people contemptuous of him and everything he holds dear. At last, they allow him to collapse on the floor of his cell. Dmitri falls asleep on the hard stone. He awakes. And some anonymous person has slipped in and slipped a pillow under Dmitri's head in the cell. And Dmitri fastens upon that anonymous act, that random act of kindness, as more determinative of his situation than his innocent victimization. He falls asleep again. And in his sleep he dreams of starving children and he longs for the suffering to end. Now, why did Dmitri focus upon that random act of kindness rather than the random act of violence as describing what was going on in the world? As you walk down the road, it makes all the difference how you read reality. It makes all the difference what story, for you, is paradigmatic. Makes all the difference how you use the God-given space you have to write yourself into the story of what's going on in the world. (organ music) (all singing)

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. You may be seated. Almighty and everlasting God, who has triumphed through Jesus Christ over the powers of evil and darkness and senseless violence, grant that we may ever hope in you, believing in your power to bring life out of death and our power to choose life even in the face of death. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- Give us eyes to see those in need upon our path and grant that we may have the courage to respond with mercy. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- Show us the ways that we might work together to make a difference in our community and world. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- Create in us one mind, one heart, and one will, that we may dedicate ourselves with unity and single-mindedness to work for your purposes on Earth. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- We pray for peace, for an end to senseless violence and a world where people may live without fear. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- For the leaders of our city, state, and nation and for all in authority that they may rule wisely and work responsibly to maintain the justice and welfare of all people. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- For Durham, Chapel Hill, and Raleigh, for every city and for those who live in them, that they may care for the needs of all their citizens and become humane communities where all share in the needs and the benefits of the society. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- For the good Earth, which God has given us, that we may have the wisdom and will to conserve it. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- For the people of Japan, as they rebuild their nation, for those who died and those who lost loved ones in the earthquake, Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- That we may end our lives in faith and hope as those who have been committed to living as your people in the world. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- Oh, Lord, our God, accept the heartfelt prayers of your people. In the multitude of your mercies, look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help, for you are gracious, oh lover of souls. And to you we give glory, now and forever. Amen. The offering is an opportunity for us to give as a sign of our commitment to God. All of today's offering will be given to charitable causes which benefit our community. (clinking) (soft organ music) (choir singing) (powerful organ music) (all singing "Hallelujah")

- Let us, pray. All things come from you, oh God, and with gratitude we return to you what is yours. You created all that is and with love, formed us in your image. When our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You gave your only son, Jesus Christ, to be our savior. All that we are and all that we have is a trust from you. And so, in gratitude for all your gifts, we offer you ourselves and all that we have in union with Christ offering for us. By your Holy Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world. Through Jesus Christ, our savior, amen. Let us pray together as Jesus taught us.

- Our father,

All: Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done as Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, amen. (inspirational organ music) (all singing)

- The grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ be with you now and always, amen. (choir singing)