

(soft organ music)

- Good morning, and welcome to this service of worship on the 19th Sunday after Pentecost here in Duke chapel. Call your attention to the announcements and activities listed in the bulletin for this week at Duke Chapel. Now let us stand for the greeting. The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

All: And also with you.

- The reason Christ is with us.

All: Henceforth. ("All My Hope is Firmly Grounded") ♪ All my hope is firmly grounded ♪ ♪ In our great and living Lord ♪ ♪ Who, whenever I most need him ♪ ♪ Never fails to keep his word ♪ ♪ Him I must ♪ ♪ Wholly trust ♪ ♪ God the ever good and just ♪ ♪ Tell me, who can trust our nature ♪ ♪ Human, weak, and insecure ♪ ♪ Which of all the airy castles ♪ ♪ Can the hurricane endure ♪ ♪ Build on sand ♪ ♪ Nought can stand ♪ ♪ By our earthly wisdom planned ♪ ♪ But in every time and season ♪ ♪ Out of love's abundant store ♪ ♪ God sustains his whole creation ♪ ♪ Fount of life forevermore ♪ ♪ We who share ♪ ♪ Earth and air ♪ ♪ Count on his unfailing care ♪ ♪ Thank, oh thank, our great Creator ♪ ♪ Through his only Son this day ♪ ♪ He alone, the heavenly Potter ♪ ♪ Made us out of earth and clay ♪ ♪ Quick to heed ♪ ♪ Strong the deed ♪ ♪ He shall all his people feed ♪

- When we gather to praise God, we remember that we are God's people but we are people who have preferred our wills to God's will. Therefore, let us begin by confessing our sin to God and to one another. Let us pray responsibly, number 890.

All: Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your name, amen.

- Almighty God, have mercy on you, forgive all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep you in eternal life, amen. Be seated.

- Let us pray.

All: Open our hearts and minds, oh God, by the power of your Holy Spirit so that as the word be spread and proclaimed, we might hear with joy what you say to us this day, amen. The first reading is taken from the Book of Job. Then Job answered the Lord I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can

be thwarted. Who is this that hides council without knowledge? Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know. Here, and I will speak, I will question you and you declare to me I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but my now eye sees you, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- The second reading is from the letter of James. Come now, you who say today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there doing business and making money. Yet, you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say if the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it commits sin. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- This reading is taken from the Gospel according to Saint Mark. John said to him teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he was not following us. But Jesus said do not stop him, for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us for us, for truly I tell you whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to Hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into Hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into Hell where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched. For everyone will be salted with fire, salt is good, but as salt has lost its saltedness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- We're at a business meeting, the flip chart shows production schedules, cost estimates, profit projections, and descriptions of several promising locations for the new business venture. The board of directors has been discussing their marketing strategy for the past several hours and are finally at the point of agreeing. They're excited about the business plans that they've made and about their new venture, and they see great potential for success and a hefty profit for each of them. It's a common scene, IBM, AT&T, Glaxo, Duke University. But in this case, it is a Greco-Roman business meeting in the Far East in the Hellenistic world of the early Christians. It involved several well-respected church members who we may assume hold positions of leadership on the finance committee because of their business expertise. Their products were most likely wine or spices instead of phone systems or computers, but the process of business planning and profit

projection is as old as human enterprise, and it is certainly something that each of us here this morning would have recognized. Admittedly, it was a primitive business meeting, and you MBA people or Economics majors would have certainly had things to teach them, but all of us are familiar with the process of engaging in business to make profit. After all, most of us have to make a living. It's a familiar scene, and a comfortable one for most of us because we're experts at planning. After all, we've learned how important it is. To take the right college prep courses, to make the right grades, to join the right clubs so that you can go to the right college and make the right grades and join the right clubs so you can get the right job and make the right salary and marry the right person and join the right clubs. Well, you know how it goes. But something happens that we don't expect. James walks into the meeting, looks around, gets the gist of what's happening and says come now, you who say today or tomorrow, we'll go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit, yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. Well, just what is James saying? And why is he criticizing a perfectly legitimate business meeting? After all, we're not talking about shady dealings here, these are good Christians, they're church members. They're honest, ethical business people who seek to engage in a legal business practice to make a reasonable profit, so what's wrong with that? Was James saying that being in business is wrong? That it's sinful to set goals and plan ahead? That it's unacceptable to make a profit? Well, he certainly wouldn't have been admitted to Duke with that kind of attitude. But as we read on in the letter, he says what is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Now folks, this is frightening stuff. It has overtones of the hellfire, brimstone type sermon that threatens one with death and eternal damnation if one doesn't obey every dictate of God and the preacher. I'll never forget attending a Revival at my grandparents' church when I was a child. It was the Corinth Community Baptist Church, it was a little country church deep in the woods of north Louisiana, and it's where most of my relatives happen to be buried. As I set there between my parents, I just knew the preacher was looking straight at me as he said this may be the last chance you have to be saved, are you gonna let it pass you by? The Devil is out there waitin' for you just around the corner to snatch you up when you leave here and throw you into the pits of eternal damnation. Well I don't know if I got saved that night or not, but my parents had a heck of a time convincing me it was okay to get back in the car to go to Grandma's house because I just knew the Devil was out there waiting for me. Now is the author of James using scare tactics to try to frighten his readers into obedience to some moral dictates? Or is there something that he has to teach us about the business of life? He goes on, you ought to say if the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance and all such boasting is evil. James doesn't say business is evil or planning is evil, or even that making a profit is evil. It seems that the problem with our business meeting is that the board members have forgotten that they're not ultimately in control of life, and they have been boasting in their own powers and intelligence and planning abilities. Remember now, these are good church members he's speaking to who faithfully attend worship. They serve in positions of leadership in the church and they try to live good lives, but they have excluded God from their business transactions and made their plans as if they alone could bring them to fruition. They profess belief in Christ, but in actuality live as practical atheists. They plan their lives as if God doesn't exist, or at the very least as if God had no concern about how they lived day to day. Even worse, they brag about their abilities and plans as if they had the power to accomplish anything apart from God. James reminds them that life doesn't always go according to plan, that their lives are like the mists, vapors, puffs of smoke that appear for a little while, and then disappear. The insecurity of life stands in stark contrast to the secure rationality of their plans. But James reminds them that, in actuality, they

don't know what their lives will be like tomorrow, or even if they will be alive. He tells them, instead you ought to say if the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that. To plan without acknowledging our absolute dependence upon God and without seeking God's will is not only foolish, but sinful, as we put ourselves in God's place. As James says in the letter, whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for that person, it is sin. You see, our merchants knew that all life was created by God and belongs to God, remember these are church members, he's preaching to the choir. But they chose to act as if they were in control of life. James was condemning them because they, of all people, should know better. He was reminding them that apart from God, there is no security in life. In a Duke hospital room, a mother sits, silently weeping, at the bedside of her child. Anxiously awaiting every painful, rasping breath as evidence that the child still clings to life. But the bleeding from a lung pierced by a stray bullet in a drive-by shooting just won't stop. At another bedside, a child sits holding her mother's hand as she slips in and out of consciousness while the tumor grows larger and her grasp on life weaker. A phone call in the middle of the night, a father awakened, startled, it's 3 o'clock a.m., heart pounding, gut wrenching fear, it must be some emergency. Are you the parent of? Your son has been in a driving accident, driving drunk. A Duke student goes in for a routine physical exam, just feeling a little tired, y'know, so many exams and staying up late. The doctor's report we'd like to do some additional tests, the signs indicate leukemia, but of course nothing's definite, yet. A hard-working businessman en route to another meeting, a diabetic seizure and a coma, losing control of the car as it plummets across the median. On the other side, a student, excited, returning to Duke for the fall semester, a PhD finally within his grasp. And suddenly, the car is there and there is no place to go, no time to react. Lives not according to plan. These are not scare tactics, we see them daily and hear these stories nightly on the news, and our newspapers, in the hospital, in our own homes and families. Whenever we are faced with the unexpected or with tragedy, we are reminded uncomfortably of our own mortality. How desperately we try to deny or forget our finiteness and lack of control over life, obsessively planning every detail of our futures. It's easier to turn off the news or pretend that bad things only happen to other people, desperately hoping it won't happen to us until we come face to face with some circumstance or unexpected tragedy in life. How many of us here have already experienced some major disappointment or loss? How many of us have lives that have not turned out exactly according to plan? It's so easy to get caught up in our plans and puffed up about our futures, but whenever we encounter our lack of control over other people or over our own lives, we are reminded dramatically, though sometimes painfully, of our absolute dependence upon God. So where do we find meaning or hope in the midst of such uncertainty? How do we find the courage to face life given the reality of our own mortality? What plans for the future can we, or should we make when we have so little control over life? The mistake our board members made was planning without God. They gave God control over their Sunday behavior, but not their every day, weekday transactions. James reminded them and us that all of life is dependent upon God. God belongs in the boardroom, in the classroom, in the bedroom, in the living room. We know that life is created by God and belongs to God, again we are the choir, we are the church that are here. Yet, we have a hard time believing that God wants to be involved in its day to day operation. Ours is a God that has chosen to be involved with us in the most intimate way. God has taken on human existence in the person of Jesus Christ, and there is no part of life that God hasn't experienced, and there is nothing in life that is insignificant to God. This is the God that has even entered in to and overcome death for our sakes, as we will remember this morning as we celebrate Communion here in this place. Through Jesus Christ, our lives, as fleeting as they might be, take on eternal significance. When Christ is at the center of all our plans, then we need not fear the

uncertainty of the future. For even in the midst of tragedy or death, we discover that Christ has gone before us, that Christ stands beside us, and that Christ is ahead of us preparing the way. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. And we can rejoice that there is nothing in life or death that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Thanks be to God.

Preacher: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Loving God, every time we come to the table, to eat and to drink, we are reminded of how dependent, how utterly daily dependent we are upon your Grace. Now we plan and we set goals, but you hold our lives in the palm of your hand. Without you, we are nothing. And that is why we pray, setting the needs of suffering humanity before your loving heart. We pray for all those brothers and sisters who perish from too little to eat, for little children who go to bed every night with knowing hunger, and for those who have so much food that we fail to recognize what a great gift and responsibility is something so ordinary and necessary as bread. We pray for children around the world, the little ones whom you love so much, children whose vulnerability and poverty reminds us of our denial of our own. Particularly do we pray for the suffering children of Iraq, of Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Serbia, Croatia, and the forgotten children of America's inner cities, and the overplanned, over program children of America's suburbs. We pray for those whose lives have been recently disrupted, whose plans have been set aside due to death, or the loss of a job, or a bad quiz grade, or children growing up, or friendship rejected. Be with them, oh God, and bring them through this difficult time with your sustaining presence. We've come here this morning, oh God, with needs, needs too near at hand to speak them aloud. For those needs, we pray. And for those whose needs we forget in our preoccupation with our own needs, we pray. Bless us, amen. Today's scripture admonishes us to be at peace with one another. Jesus said if you come and offer your gift at the altar and there's something between you, your brother, or your sister, first make peace and then offer your gift. Therefore, let us stand and offer one another signs of God's peace. (assembly clamoring) And now, as if forgiven and reconciled people, let us offer our gifts to God. ("Hide Not Thy Face") ♪ Hide not thou thy face from us, oh Lord ♪ ♪ And cast off thy servant in Thy displeasure ♪ ♪ For we confess our sins unto thee ♪ ♪ And hide not our unrighteousness ♪ ♪ For thy mercy's sake ♪ ♪ For thy mercy's sake ♪ ♪ Deliver us from all our sins ♪ ♪ Deliver us from all our sins ♪ ♪ For thy mercy's sake ♪ ♪ For thy mercy's sake ♪ ♪ Deliver us from all our sins ♪ ♪ Deliver us from all our sins ♪ (bright organ music) (upbeat organ music) ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise Him all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Praise Him above ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

- Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them up to the Lord.

- Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right and just.

- It is a right and good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, you formed us in your image, even when we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. And so, with your people on Earth and all the company of Heaven, we praise your name and join in there unending hymn. (bright music) ♪ Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts ♪ ♪ Heaven and earth are full of your glory ♪ ♪ Hosanna in the highest ♪ ♪ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord ♪ ♪ Hosanna in the highest ♪ Holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus Christ. Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to set at liberty those oppressed and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people. He healed the sick, he fed the hungry, he ate with sinners. By his baptism of suffering and death and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, you delivered us. When the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always by the power of your word and Holy Spirit. On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, he gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said take, eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And when the supper was over, he took a cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples and said drink from this, all of you, for this is the blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. And do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. And so, in remembrance of these, your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith. (somber organ music) ♪ Christ has died ♪ ♪ Christ is Risen ♪ ♪ Christ, You come on High ♪ Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ and one with each other until Christ comes in final victory and we feast as his Heavenly banquet. Through your son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever.

(somber organ music) ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ A, amen ♪

All: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be they name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as 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, the power, and the glory forever and ever, amen.

- When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing the body of Christ? When we give thanks over the cup, is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? The body of Christ, the blood of Christ. Come to the Lord's table. As we commune, the congregation will join the choir in singing Hymn 614. ("For the Bread Which You Have Broken") ♪ For the bread, which You have broken ♪ ♪ For the wine, which You have poured ♪ ♪ For the words, which You have spoken ♪ ♪ Now we give You thanks, oh Lord ♪ ♪ By this promise that You love us ♪ ♪ By Your gift of peace restored ♪ ♪ By Your call to Heaven above us ♪ ♪ Hallow all our lives, oh Lord ♪ ♪ With the saints who now adore You ♪ ♪ Seated at the heavenly board ♪ ♪ May the Church still waiting for You ♪ ♪ Keep love's tie unbroken, Lord ♪ ♪ In Your service, Lord, defend us ♪ ♪ In our hearts keep watch and

ward ♪ ♪ In the world to which You send us ♪ ♪ Let Your kingdom come, oh Lord ♪ (singing in foreign language) Please stand. May the Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit go with you and be with you now and always. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ("How Firm a Foundation") ♪ How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord ♪ ♪ Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word ♪ ♪ What more can He say than to you He hath said ♪ ♪ To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled ♪ ♪ Fear not, I am with thee, oh be not dismayed ♪ ♪ For I am thy God and will still give thee aid ♪ ♪ I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand ♪ ♪ Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand ♪ ♪ When through the deep waters I call thee to go ♪ ♪ The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow ♪ ♪ For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless ♪ ♪ And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress ♪ ♪ When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie ♪ ♪ My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply ♪ ♪ The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design ♪ ♪ Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine ♪ ♪ The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose ♪ ♪ I will not, I will not desert to its foes ♪ ♪ That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake ♪ ♪ I'll never, no never, no never forsake ♪