

- Duke University Chapel service of worship Palm Sunday, April 3rd, 1977, 11 o'clock. (serene organ music) (serene organ music continues) (serene organ music continues) (choir singing) ♪ Son of man ♪ (choir sings) ♪ Now and forever more ♪ ♪ Now and forever more ♪

- Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. (congregation chants) It is right to praise you all mighty God for the acts of love by which you have redeemed us through your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. On this day, he entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph and was proclaimed as king of kings by those who spread their garments and branches of palm along his way. Let these branches be for us signs of his victory. And grant that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our king and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life, who lives and reigns in glory with you, and the holy spirit, now and forever.

- Amen.

- Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. (congregation chants) (serene organ music) (organ playing over singers) (organ playing over singers) (organ playing over singers) (upbeat organ music) (organ playing over singers) (organ playing over singers) (organ playing over singers)

- We really don't want you to sit in each other's lap, nor do we want you to make yourself uncomfortable. But we would like to ask you if there is space in the pew where you were sitting to please move toward the center aisle so that some of those who are waiting may be seated. I think there is some extra space. My friends in Christ, seeing that indeed, we do have a great high priest who has passed into Heaven. Even Jesus, the Christ, the son of God, let us now together, come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy. That we may find grace to help in this and every time of need. Together, let us humbly confess our sin to all mighty God.

- Oh God, we who proclaim with loud Hosannas that Jesus is our Lord. Our people who like Peter will deny you three times and more. We sing your glory and praise, but have difficulty being obedient to your love and goodwill. We comfort ourselves with a thousand easy slogans and heroic fantasies, we forget those who suffer because of us. We do not see our involvement in social crime. We substitute benign indifference for active love. Teach us the joy of gratitude expressed in waving of the palm branches. May this joy replace the bitterness of resentment in all our lives. Amen.

- Now with your own words and in your own relationship with God, let us make our personal confession to all mighty God. (baby cries) Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us. May the almighty and ever merciful God grant unto us pardon and forgiveness of our sins, intention to lead a new life, and the grace and comfort of the holy spirit. Amen. (serene organ music) (organ playing over singers) (dramatic organ music) (upbeat organ music) (men singing) (women singing) (congregation sings) (congregation sings) (ethereal organ music) (women singing) (men singing) (congregation sings)

- Let us stand for the reading of the gospel. The gospel for today is from the 21st chapter of Matthew, beginning at the first verse. "And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples saying to them, 'Go into the village, opposite you. And immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If any man says anything to you, you shall say the Lord has need of them. And he will send them immediately.'" This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on an ass and on a colt, the foal of an ass." The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the ass and the colt and put their garments on them, and he sat there on. Most of the crowds, spread their garments on the road and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him, shouted, "Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest." And when he and a Jerusalem, all the city was stirred saying, "Who is this?" And the crowd said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee." Here ends the reading of the gospel. (serene organ music) (congregation sings)

- Let us affirm what we believe.

- We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make, new who works in us and others by the spirit. We trust God, who calls us to be the church to celebrate life and its fullness, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil. Our judge and our hope, in life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

- The Lord be with you. (congregation chants) Let us pray. On this holy day, oh God. We come together to celebrate, to celebrate the blessedness of the life of Christ given to us shared for us, lived with us, died for us and raised for us. All that we might know and understand ourselves more truly, and might know the fullness of that abundant life which comes from you and that we might know and love you. And know also how deeply we are loved by you. Even as a father or a mother loves and cares for a child. We take our place, oh God, among those who cheer and praise and shout, "Blessed are you, oh Christ." Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord. Stir us now, stir us from our complacency and our callousness. We might be alert and caring. We sing our hallelujahs and Hosannas. Keep us, keep us from hollow, and half-hearted allegiance to you, oh God. In spite of the crowds and the noise of the way, it was a lonely road for our Lord, help us now to have such an intimate relationship with him that he might know our faithfulness and that we might know his love. Keep us, oh God, ever in tune with the needs of others, those closest and dearest to us and those unknown to us. As others walk this day for those who are hungry. May we all know and care for those who are hungry in body and in spirit. And may we reach out and touch their lives in some way, with the love and with the spirit of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Help us to become Christ to our neighbor, oh God. Food to the hungry, health to this sick, friend to the lonely, freedom to the bound in all of our daily living. And then oh Lord may we know, yes, may we know the life of love, the presence of joy and the hope of glory through the risen and triumphant Christ, our Lord, we pray these words and the prayer, which he has told all his disciples to pray, praying our father-

- Who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day, our daily bread, forgive us, our trespasses. As we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil. Thy is the kingdom, power, and the glory forever. Amen.

- It is my understanding that come rain or otherwise this afternoon, the crop walk will be held. So that those of you who have agreed to walk are invited to come and join. Some of us have made that commitment and are still waiting to see what the weather's going to do, but we're all encouraged to come and walk. And if you have made a commitment to pledge something for every mile, a given person walks, your contributions are greatly needed to help care for those both in our own community and around the world who are hungry. May I remind you of the special services in the chapel this week. Thursday evening, the Maundy Thursday, communion service, Friday at noon, our Good Friday service followed by two hours of organ music, Easter Sunday morning, the sunrise service at 6:00 am in the gardens and at nine and 11:00 am worship here in the chapel. And then at seven o'clock next Easter Sunday night, the North Carolina Symphony and the choir will bless and thrill us all. You and your friends and neighbors are invited to share in these very, very special services this holy week, if you would like one of the palms following the service this morning, there will be ministers and ushers at the doors to distribute these to you so that you might have this memento of this particular service. There will be a communion service in the Memorial Chapel immediately following this service, for those of you who would like to share in that. Dr. James T Cleland some time ago, officially retired from the university. Those of us who know him and love him and appreciate him know that there will only come one moment when he retires his most recent contributions to us was his most recent contribution was his reading of the scripture during the presentation of the word became flesh recently, very moving and rich experience for all of us. So today we welcome again, the beloved and greatly anticipated preacher for today. Dean Emeritus of Duke Chapel, Dr. James T Cleland, who's sermon topic is "The Happiest Day in Jesus' Life?" Jim, thank you.

- Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. For many years, the story of Jesus coming to Jerusalem after his Galilean ministry on the first Palm Sunday, whatever it was named then, it has been referred to as the triumphal entry. It was a strange procession. According to St. Matthew, as we heard in the lesson, Jesus rode in on two animals, a donkey and a colt, thus fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy. My own visualization is that he sat on the donkey sidesaddle with his feet on the colt. A kind of moving chair and footstool. It's something of a minor miracle, which is not inappropriate in the New Testament. It was for Hosannas, oh, glory Lord and honor, and rousing anthem as the folk of his own countryside, escorted Jesus into Jerusalem, the religious capital, making certain that the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee was linked with God through the great King David. Now, how did Jerusalem react? They were accustomed to processions, small and large, especially before the Passover, when Jews from all over the ancient world, throng to the Holy City, for many of them, an annual pilgrimage. As you might expect, Judaism was conservative, the people of a book, which Christians call the Old Testament, Pharisees controlled the synagogues. They were teachers and were deeply respected. The Sadducees, the priestly aristocracy control the temple and neither Pharisee nor Sadducees was very enthusiastic about the Profit of Nazareth. They tried to argue with them, but they could not phase this amazing mentor who was just as interesting as he was brilliant. However, when Jesus moved from teaching to cleaning up the temple in no gentle fashion, they sought how they might destroy him. You know how they acted. They bribed one disciple, Judas, to

betray Jesus and turn Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea. How did Jesus react to all this? And there's a sad passage in Luke 19, "When he entered Jerusalem, he wept." And then he prophesied, "If you reject me, it will be the end of the city. Your enemies will not only murder your children. They will not leave in Jerusalem, one stone upon another." And that's exactly what happened about 40 years later. That's why I placed a question mark after the title of the sermon, "The Happiest Day in Jesus' Life?" Several interpreters look upon Palm Sunday as the happiest day in his life. I doubt it. I doubt it because I think Jesus doubted it too. Consider what Jesus was up against: Church and state. Now it's a serious business for a loner to take on either, but to find the two united against you is enough to make most folk pause and withdraw. Moreover Jesus' Jewish opponents had managed to bribe Judas, one of the disciples, to betray him. So the Pharisees and the Sadducees had won that round. Having brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, who following a perfunctory examination of the case, suggested that Jesus be released. The Jewish adversaries would have nothing of this. So Pilate evidently somewhat unwillingly, passed Jesus over to the military to be scourged and crucified. Crucifixion was so torturous and terrible a means of death that no Roman under went it, unless perhaps treason was the charge. When Saint Paul was arrested, tried, found guilty, he pointed out that he was a Roman citizen. So he was not crucified. He was beheaded. Either the Carthaginians or the Phoenicians invented crucifixion. They had another technique, which even the Romans were hesitant to use, to stake the condemned criminal on the desert sand with arms and legs bound tight and the face always toward the sun. And the last exquisite piece of torture was to cut off the eye lids. And how did Jesus' intimate followers react? They disappeared. That is the men did with the exception of John. He, with the Galilean women, stayed by to look after Mary, the mother of Jesus. Jesus had asked John to look after his mother and he did, but then two leaders of the Jews, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, secret disciples, took charge of the disposal of the body. Joseph went to Pilate and asked that he might take over and Pilate agreed. Jesus was laid in Joseph's own new tomb where never man had yet lain. The happiest day in Jesus' life? (speaking in foreign language) Jesus of Nazareth. Now what do we make of all this from the viewpoint of what it means to us, it's hardly a Christmas story. It is not at this point in the history of Jesus, a success story. And yet there are some rich insights. Judaism was, as it still is, a noble religion. One ancestor of Christianity. The Reformed Christian tradition is a younger offshoot of the synagogue, temple. Judaism is an older religion than Christianity, as respectable, as efficacious, as worthy as its younger relative, to which most of us belong. Moreover, Rome was a great empire, believing and practicing the motto, (speaking in foreign language), let justice stand even if the sky comes down, even if the Heavens fall. It was unwillingly, perhaps in somewhat cowardly fashion, but pilot put Jesus to death. Jesus found that in the eyes of the Roman empire, He, the prophet of Nazareth was from one aspect, a nuisance. And from another aspect, a criminal, if he'd have lived a few years longer, he might have been well aware that a wise man doesn't tackle church and state at the same time. Now what has happened is that a new inspiration is in conflict with custom and habit. When you tackle church and state, it's almost always difficult for ordinary goodness to know what to do with unusual goodness. And if Jesus was anything, he was unusual goodness. Now next Lord's day will be Easter Sunday. The real birthday of the church. No Easter, no Christian Church is that as we known down the centuries, I sometimes feel that no one should be allowed in church on Easter Sunday, unless they have been in church for three hours around noon on Good Friday, which for me, will always be Bad Friday. It makes one aware of the daily dangers of unusual goodness. As I wrote this sermon that came to my mind a hymn, which I learned as a small boy in a Scottish Sunday school. It's a bit mushy, but I'll read, not sing, (congregation laughs) just the first verse and then

paraphrase the last line of that verse. I think when I read that sweet story of old, when Jesus was here among men, how he called little children as lambs to where the fold, I should liked to have been with them then. And that reminds me of another Sunday school episode in Glasgow, though I only have it by hearsay. Sunday school teacher there once upon a time having read the story of the entry into Jerusalem, asked her class why the onlookers had spread their garments and their palms in front of Jesus. A small boy answered courteously and without hesitation, "Please miss, to trip the donkey." (congregation laughs) And you know, he came awfully close to the truth, the donkey he was tripped that week and Jesus was dead at the end of that week. Maybe he wasn't so very, very far wrong. Would I like to have been with Jesus on that Palm Sunday visit to Jerusalem? I'm not sure that I would have had the courage. Maybe it's worth a second thought between now and Maundy Thursday and Good or Bad Friday and Easter. It may well be worthwhile to open our gospels and read the passages there about that last week in the life of our Lord. And so let me pray again with you the prayer that I opened this sermon with. Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto the, oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. (ethereal organ music) (congregation sings) (congregation singing continues) (ethereal organ music continues) (ethereal organ music) (ethereal organ music) (ethereal organ music) (men singing in foreign language) (women singing in foreign language) (choir singing in foreign language) (ethereal organ music) (choir vocalizes) (women sing in foreign language) (men sing in foreign language) (women sing in foreign language) (men sing in foreign language) (women sing in foreign language) (men sing in foreign language) (women sing in foreign language) (men sing in foreign language) (choir vocalizes) (woman sings in foreign language) (man sings in foreign language) (choir vocalizes) (choir sings) (choir vocalizes) ♪ Amen ♪ (ethereal organ music) (congregation sings) ♪ Amen ♪

- Oh, Lord, our God. From whom we receive all and upon whom we really are dependent, accept this offering, which we give now of ourselves, use our being and our doing, our gifts and our good, for your glory and the care of our neighbors, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. (ethereal organ music) (ethereal organ music continues) (ethereal organ music continues) (ethereal organ music continues)

- And now without bowing our heads or closing our eyes, will you receive this blessing which I offer in the name of Christ, the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. The love of God and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you this day and forever. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (upbeat organ music) (upbeat organ music continues) (upbeat organ music continues) (upbeat organ music continues) (upbeat organ music continues) (upbeat organ music continues)