

- Easter Sunday worship service, April sixth, 1980, Duke Chapel. (organ music) (organ music) (horn music) (hymnal singing) (congregation in unison)

- And a voice from the throne said, behold, I make all things new. (congregation in unison) Amen and amen. (organ music) (hymnal singing) In order that our joy in the knowledge that neither death nor life, things present or to come or anything else within the whole creation can separate us from God's love. Let us call one another to confession of our sins. If there is no resurrection of the dead, (congregation in unison) if Christ has not been raised, (congregation in unison) but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. (congregation in unison) Let us worship God, let us pray. Be seated please. Oh God who raised Jesus Christ and made him lord of all time, forgive us for the ways we have treated the time given to us. We have wasted time considering our lives to be of little worth. We have marked time ignoring the opportunities for service and care that come to us each day. We have killed time seeing life itself as a threat rather than as a gift. We have been nostalgic for a past that never was. Selfish in the present and fearful of the future. We give thanks that in the power of the resurrection Jesus is the lord of past, present and future. Redeem our time, oh lord, forgive us our past sins, renew our present lives, restore our confidence in your future. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. Let us confess in silence, our personal sins. The lord has given us life that we may rejoice in the lord. The lord has given us love and granted us deliverance. The lord has given us the power of new life from which comes faith that sees us through doubt and adversity. Love that binds us to the lord and to one another and hope that takes us beyond the tumults of this world to the peace and tranquility of the world to come as loved, freed and forgiven people. In the name of the lord, let us forgive one another. Let us give thanks for God is good and God's love is everlasting. (congregation in unison) Amen. We would like to request, please, that if you are able to do so, you will move in toward the center aisle so that some of those who are standing may be seated. I welcome all of you today who are present here and those who worship with us by radio and by television and I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ. Whose resurrection we gather to celebrate. Like Mary of Magdala, we too have seen the lord and it is marvelous in our eyes. Alleluia.

- Let us pray. Prepare our hearts, oh lord, to accept your word. Silence in us, any voice but your own. That hearing, we may also obey your will through Jesus Christ, our lord, amen. The Old Testament lesson is from the 15th chapter of Exodus, selected verses. Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord saying, I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider, he has thrown into the sea. The lord is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. Who is like thee, oh lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders? Thou has led in thy steadfast love the people whom thou hast redeemed. Thou has guided them by thy strength to thy holy abode. Thou will bring them in and plant them on thy own mountain. The place, oh lord, which thou has made for thy abode. The sanctuary, oh lord, which thy hands have established. The lord will reign for ever and ever. The epistle lesson is from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verses one through 11. Now I would remind you brethren, in what terms I preach to you the gospel which you received, in which you stand, by

which you are saved if you hold it fast unless you have believed in vain. For I deliver to you as of the first importance what I also received. That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. That he was buried, and that he rose on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. And that he appeared to Cephas, then to the 12. Then he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time. Most of whom are still alive. Though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all of the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles. Unfit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is in me. Here ended the reading of the epistle. (organ music) (hymnal singing) Let the congregation stand for the reading of the gospel. The gospel lesson is from the 24th chapter of Luke, verses one through 11. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn they went to the tomb taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened, and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and on the third day, rise. And they remembered these words. And returning from the tomb, they told all of this to the 11, and to all of the rest. Now it was that Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them. Here ended the reading of the lesson. (organ music) (hymnal singing)

- Let us pray. Oh God, take now these words and make of them your holy word and may the very living presence of our risen lord come alive to each of us in new and special ways, this day we pray through Christ, our lord, amen. E.E. Cummings has a word for us this blessed Easter morning. He writes, "I thank you God for most, this amazing day. For the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue true dream of sky. And for everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes." We do give thanks to God for everything this day. Everything which is natural, everything which is infinite, everything which is yes. And as we do, there is one word I want to share this morning that is at the heart and soul of this Easter story that comes singing through our gospel lesson and that has become clearer and clearer to me this particular holy Lenten season. And that is that the promises of God are true and can be trusted. The word of the lord is fulfilled. Death has been overcome. Christ is risen. Easter. Easter flowers, Easter sunshine, Easter crosses, Easter. I want to say this morning that I believe in the message of Easter. I believe in the God who sustained Jesus through Easter. I believe in the Christ who gave himself to death, hell and the grave and was raised that we might know life, might know life now and forever. Yes, I believe in Easter. And to believe in Easter, though, we must believe in dying. It was just about three weeks ago, I was talking with a middle aged woman. The words on the lips of this middle aged wife, mother and caring friend in many of her church, the words on her lips came out haltingly but convincingly as she talked with me. 43 years old, mother of three, leader in her church, she had learned just six weeks earlier of malignant cancer in several of her organs and literally spread throughout her body. We sat and talked and near the end of our conversation, she looked me straight in the eyes and said, I don't want to die. I want to live. I have so very much to live for. And so she does. Dying is that mysterious experience in life that many people can describe but that no one understands. But the Easter message response to that deep and mysterious threat, that threat which says that everything that is

possible is not always possible. Easter, my friends, puts into perspective the plight of those who suffer, you, me, others around us who suffer, those who are dying slowly but surely, day by day. The migrant worker in California or Florida or Mexico or North Carolina. The migrant worker who just does not know what to do or where to go. The parolee from prison who is in no one's land because no one wants him. No one claims him. No one trusts him. No one seems to care for him and there's nowhere to go. The teenage alcoholic and unfortunately we have some of those right here on campus and in this community. The teenage alcoholic who started out drinking to prove that he or she was really somebody and now longs earnestly to feel and to believe that he or she is somebody. Yes, dying takes many forms as it captures our lives and the lives of those around us, right here, right now but the Easter message comes to us and the Easter message reaches in and touches those hidden rooms and those hidden thoughts of many men and women, many described By Marilyn French when she writes in her book, *The Women's Room*, she writes, "I feel like a survivor who has lost everything but her life, who wanders around inside a skinny, shriveled body collecting dandelion greens and muttering to herself. I feel like a survivor who has lost everything but life." But we don't have to wander around inside ourselves, we can become a part of him who is the living, not among the dead, but the living among the living and so before we look at Easter flowers and Easter sunshine and Easter crosses, we must know that Easter belief begins with a belief in dying. To believe in Easter, we must believe in life. Easter, I believe, is a positive, loving and constant yes on the part of God to our lives, to us as individuals, to us as specific persons. Easter makes it possible for each one of us to say, not that death is not the end but it makes it possible for each one of us to say, death is not the end for me. Death for no individual person, young or old, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, black or white, north or south, have or have not, death we know for no one is ever ordinary. And Easter says, on the other hand, loudly and clearly that life for no one is ever ordinary. Life for each one is important, life for each one has eternal worth. So Easter. Easter is that experience for you and me when we can come down from the mountain or up from the valley, can come down from that frightening, precarious mountain that we live on sometimes or can come up out of the very pits of hell themselves where we often live day by dragging day. Easter is a return, it is a new exodus, it is a rebirth, a new living that frees us just as quickly as Jesus freed the adulteress woman when he said to her, go and sin no more. Anyone who has lived, anyone who has ever been upon the mountain's edge or in the depths of the valley, anyone who knows life, anyone, anyone of us who has ever sinned needs Easter. But before we look at Easter flowers and Easter sunshine, and Easter crosses, we must know that Easter belief begins with a belief in life. To believe in Easter is to believe in others. We know about the experience of the baptism of our lord, who he stepped into the river Jordan and was baptized by John. When our lord stepped in to the Jordan waters, though, he didn't enter there so that anyone or all of his sins might be washed away, rather, Jesus went down into the Jordan river to identify with each and every one of us. To become one with us in our concerns, one with us in our cares, one with us in our sins, if you will. As the law in the Old Testament spoke about fulfillment through obeying God's precepts, it was Jesus who came to announce that we must love one another. No longer were we going to be forgiven by the keeping of the law and by keeping any or all of the precepts. But rather, now from now on we are to be forgiven as we forgive others. No longer is salvation to the nation or to the people or to the community but salvation comes to those who care for those who are the least among us. And as Elie Weisel puts it in his book, *The Madness of God*, "Some things are just too important to be done alone, and so they are." Easter, my friends, makes all the difference in the world. All the difference in the world for you and me and for every child of God on the face of this Earth. There is no other experience that this Earth has ever seen that shows how deeply we are cared for as

does the crucifixion, resurrection of Jesus. Easter is God's word to you and to me and to every other child of God, saying, I love you. I love you. I love you. And so before we look at Easter flowers and Easter sunshine and Easter crosses, we must know that Easter belief begins with a belief in others. To believe in Easter means that we believe in Jesus who is the Christ. Easter is a word of thanks be to you, oh God. The response to Easter is not words of acceptance or of belief nor even of obedience. The response to Easter is a doxology, a dox a logos. A praise to the lord. Jesus the Christ, that is who. That radical human being and some people for some strange reason don't like to think of Jesus as a radical or a revolutionary but he was, my friends. And it was his radicalness that took him to the cross and it was the radical love of God which raised him from the dead. That radical human being who invites all of us to take the same radical stance that he did. To defy that last temptation when they taunted him, come down off the cross and he calls us also not to come down off the cross and take an easy way of life but he calls us to remain there. To remain there on our cross until our Easter comes. This radical Jesus invites those to follow. Those of us who will to follow just as he invited Mary Magdalene and Mary came to know Jesus so well, so intimately, so familiarly that on that Easter morning, all she had to hear was Mary and she knew immediately that it was no longer the gardener who was standing beside her but it was Jesus her lord. That radical stance that invited others to follow so that he could send us forth to heal, to forgive, to care, to love. You remember Jesus' friend, Lazarus? Lazarus died. The way I remember Lazarus is that when I was a little boy growing up in the Baptist church, and the Methodist church, I first went to one and then to the other. The only memory verse I could ever remember in the whole bible was Jesus wept. That's the experience that Jesus had with Lazarus. Lazarus was Jesus' friend. The death of Lazarus did evoke weeping from Jesus. Lazarus lay in his tomb until the word of Jesus came to him and Jesus said, Lazarus come forth, come out, come out this moment. Lazarus was in his tomb just as you and I are in our tombs until we hear the word of Jesus saying, come out, come out, come out this moment. And my friends, it is the risen Christ and he alone who can issue that invitation to you and to me. Jesus the Christ has become the first fruits of them that slept. The lord is risen, the lord is risen indeed, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, amen. (drum roll) (horn music) (hymnal singing)

- Let us unite in this historic confession of the Christian faith. I believe in God, the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our lord who was conceived by the holy spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God, the father almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the holy spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen. The lord be with you. (congregation in unison) Let us pray. On this day of days, mighty God, we come to bless your name. We thank you for Jesus our savior, who for our sakes became poor and dwelt among us for 30 years earning his living, declining no humble tasks, knowing our joys, our sorrows, our happiness, our hurts. We rejoice that through him death is finished. Love prevails that he is present with us now. We thank you that no hesitancy in believing, no impossibility of circumstance, no hardness of heart, no familiarity with Easters past need deprive our soul of this day's joy and peace. Do thou quiet in our minds, oh God, and deliver us from momentary preoccupations that we may exercise our faith in you through this, our prayer for others and ourselves. Give us peace from our individual and corporate anxieties. Give us rest from our troubles. Release us from selfishness so that we may open our hearts to the cares of the world and have our minds opened to the realities of who and whose we are. Teach us, our loving maker, that in prayer there are

no secrets. We do most earnestly pray for all brothers and sisters of every land and race who do not know the gospel of the cross in empty tomb. Make us true Christian witnesses to them, not for vain glory but in humble response to your commission to us through Jesus. May the world know we are Christian, not through the cut of clothes on our backs, the language we speak or the size of our bank accounts, but through our love. Love for each other and for all strangers within and beyond our gates. We pray for the untaught. Brothers and sisters of all ages who through their own choosing or conditions forced upon them, are locked in a prison of ignorance. Often an ignorance of the dignity of their own lives as your children. Or ignorance of civil and political rights and of proper nutrition and of the joy of literacy. Inspire us to teach. To serve you by serving the untaught but also, most just God, make us to see our own ignorances and to willingly embrace that which persons of other cultures can teach us. For we, oh God, need to learn and relearn the lessons of kindness, patience and respect for one another. And we pray, oh God, for those who destroy your creation. That their eyes may be open to their sin. May those who kill and mutilate and pollute what you have made, feel the wrath of your judgment. For in your merciful judgment is the love that transforms, makes new and gives us second chances. We pray for our brothers and sisters who hold political, economic and social power. That they may honor you by extending justice, peace and compassion for all people. We pray for the forgotten, the mistreated, for unloved children, for unloving parents, for unloved parents and unloving children. Hard hearted adults and all persons twisted by hate. We pray for those whose bodies hurt. Whose minds are in a panic and for all who fear tomorrow. Make us missionaries of your redemption, agents of your healing, bearers of your comfort. After the manner of Jesus, keep us at the side of those who need us. We pray as a company of those who love you and we pray in the name of Jesus our savior who lives and who teaches us to pray. Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done on 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. (choral music) (hymnal singing) Holy God, by the blood of your son you have opened up a new way of living and granting us to come into your presence. Today we bring offerings knowing that all that is in heaven and on Earth belongs to you, lord. And that it is of your own we give you, praying that you will accept us and these, your gifts for your glory through Jesus Christ, your son who died that we too might live, amen. (organ music) (hymnal singing) Go in the peace of Christ to serve him and the world and the grace of the lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you always. (hymnal singing)