

- Duke University Chapel, service of worship, August 10th, 1980. (organ music) (instrumental music) ♪ Praise the Lord, ye heavens, adore Him ♪ ♪ Praise Him, angels, in the height ♪ ♪ Sun and moon, rejoice before Him ♪ ♪ Praise Him, all ye stars of night ♪ ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ ♪ For He hath spoken ♪ ♪ Worlds His mighty voice obeyed ♪ ♪ Laws which never shall be broken ♪ ♪ For their guidance hath He made ♪ (organ music) ♪ God of grace and God of glory ♪ ♪ On Thy people pour Thy power ♪ ♪ Crown Thy ancient church's story ♪ ♪ Bring their bud to glorious flower ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ For the facing of this hour ♪ ♪ For the facing of this hour ♪ ♪ Lo the hosts of evil round us ♪ ♪ Scorn the Christ, assail His ways ♪ ♪ From the fears that long have bound us ♪ ♪ Free our hearts to faith and praise ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ For the living of these days ♪ ♪ For the living of these days ♪ ♪ Cure Thy children's warring madness ♪ ♪ Bend our pride to Thy control ♪ ♪ Shame our wanton, selfish gladness ♪ ♪ Rich in things and poor in soul ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ Lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal ♪ ♪ Lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal ♪ ♪ Set our feet on lofty places ♪ ♪ Gird our lives that they may be ♪ ♪ Armored with all Christlike graces ♪ ♪ In our life to set them free ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ That we fail not them nor Thee ♪ ♪ That we fail not them nor Thee ♪ ♪ Save us from weak resignation ♪ ♪ To the evils we deplore ♪ ♪ Let the gift of Thy salvation ♪ ♪ Be our glory evermore ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ Serving Thee whom we adore ♪ ♪ Serving Thee whom we adore ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Dear brothers and sisters, Scripture moves us to acknowledge and confess our sins before Almighty God with a humble, lowly, penitent and obedient heart to the end that we may obtain forgiveness by the Lord's infinite goodness and mercy. Let us confess our sins to Almighty God. O Almighty God. Please be seated.

- O Almighty God, we come weighed down with the problems of a wealthy society, and yet we complain about what we do not have. Our bank accounts have become our Bibles. Interest and dividends are the blessings we seek. But we are spiritually poor. Forgive us for our warped sense of value, distorted by our greed. Forgive us for our anxiety over wealth, while at the same time, we have little concern for our spiritual welfare. Make us rich with the gifts of Your Spirit, which inflation or a depression or even death cannot take from us. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

- Let us draw near to the Lord in silent meditation and lay before our God the private confessions of our hearts and souls. Hear these words of assurance. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Let us join the versicle of thanksgiving. Let us give thanks for God is good and God's love is everlasting.

- Thanks be to God whose love has made us. Thanks be to God whose mercy forgives us. Thanks be to God whose promise secures us. Amen.

- Let me offer a word of welcome to each of you who are worshiping with us this morning. We pray that you will find in this service sustenance and strength that will abide with you in the days ahead. I need to note one correction in the bulletin at this time. The closing hymn of our service will be hymn number 152. The morning's preacher is Ellen Kirby. For the past 11 years, Ellen has served on the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. Her current position is as Executive Secretary in Administration with Responsibilities with the Women's Division. It is a privilege to have with us one whose ministry is so vital and so far-reaching and we look forward to sharing in that ministry this morning as Ellen proclaims the word to us. Let us pray. Prepare our hearts, O 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 taken from the book of Ecclesiastes, the second chapter, the 18th through the 26th verses. So I came to hate all my labor and toil here under the sun since I should have to leave its fruits to my successor. What sort of a man will he be who succeeds me? Who inherits what others have acquired? Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master of all the fruits of my labor and skill here under the sun. This too is emptiness. Then I turned and gave myself up to despair, reflecting upon all my labor and toil here under the sun. For anyone who toils with wisdom, knowledge and skill must leave it all to a man who has spent no labor on it. This too is emptiness and utterly wrong. What reward has a man for all his labor, his scheming and his toil here under the sun? All his life long, his business is pain and vexation to him. Even at night, his mind knows no rest. This too is emptiness. There is nothing better for a man to do than to eat and drink and enjoy himself in return for his labors. And yet I saw that this comes from the hand of God. For without Him, who can enjoy his food or who can be anxious? God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to the man who pleases Him while to the sinner is given the trouble of gathering and amassing wealth only to hand it over to someone else who pleases God. This too is emptiness and chasing the wind. Here ends the reading from the Old Testament, amen. (organ music) ♪ I have longed ♪ ♪ For Thy saving health ♪ ♪ O Lord ♪ ♪ Thy law ♪ ♪ Is my delight ♪ ♪ Is my delight ♪ ♪ O Lord ♪ ♪ I have longed ♪ ♪ For Thy saving health ♪ ♪ O Lord ♪ ♪ Thy law ♪ ♪ Is my delight ♪ ♪ Is my delight ♪ ♪ O Lord ♪ ♪ O let my soul live ♪ ♪ O let my soul live ♪ ♪ And it shall praise Thee ♪ ♪ And Thy judgments ♪ ♪ Thy judgments ♪ ♪ Shall help me ♪ ♪ O let my soul live ♪ ♪ O let my soul live ♪ ♪ And it shall praise Thee ♪ ♪ And Thy judgments ♪ ♪ Thy judgments ♪ ♪ Shall help me ♪

- Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the gospel lesson? The gospel lesson is from Luke, the 12th chapter, verses 13 through 21. A man in the crowd said to Him, Master, tell my brother to divide the family property with me. He replied, My good man, who set Me over you to judge or arbitrate? Then He said to the people, Beware, be on your guard against greed of every kind. For even when a man has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life. And He told them this parable. There was a rich man whose land yielded heavy crops. He debated with himself, What am I to do? I have not the space to store my produce. This is what I will do, said he. I will pull down my storehouses and build them bigger. I will collect in them all my corn and other goods and then say to myself, Man, you have plenty of good things laid by, enough for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink and enjoy yourself. But God said to him, You fool. This very night, you must surrender your life. You have made your money. Who will get it now? That is how it is with the man who amasses wealth for himself and remains a pauper in the sight of God. (organ music) ♪ Glory be to our Creator ♪ ♪ Praise to our Redeemer Lord ♪ ♪ Glory be to our Sustainer ♪ ♪ Ever three and ever one ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ Ever shall be ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Good morning. First, let me say a word of appreciation to those here at Duke who extended to me this invitation to be with you, to be back in North Carolina, my home state and to especially be among family and friends. For several weeks, during the very recent hot weather in New York City where we live, my three year old son would come to us and say, "Could I have some country time?" Neither my husband nor I knew exactly what he was talking about but as his language skills improved and the weather got hotter, he came to us and said, "Please give me some of that good ol' Country Time." We still didn't know what he wanted. But finally we began to figure it out. We realized that this urban toddler didn't really want to go back and live with his grandparents in the countryside of North Carolina. He just wanted some lemonade. And I bet some of you would like some right now too. This story suggests a situation that is very symbolic of the times in which we live. We live in an age where babes know the names of things by their products, before their proper names. Where the jingle jangle of the commercial tunes are ingrained in the consciousness before the nursery rhythm. And as a taxi driver in New York City told me yesterday on the way to the airport, We have political candidates who are packaged by Madison Avenue experts and sold to the voters like bars of soap. Ours is a consumer age. To consume has become an art. We take courses to learn how to be good consumers. Teenagers pay to buy T-shirts with advertisements of products so that they can be identified by their relationship to these products. We wouldn't allow a salesperson into our homes to influence our preschoolers with their products but we let television come into our home to bombard children with thousands of products before they're even old enough to read, much less make any kind of intelligent decision about purchasing. Our text for today deal directly with some of the problems of excessive consumerism. The story in Ecclesiastes relates the anxiety of the person who has worked all of his or her life to accumulate earthly possessions yet there is no joy in the life because of the fear that someone else, someone unknown might benefit from the accumulations when the person dies. Jesus' words as recorded in Luke could not have been stronger. Beware. Not watch out. Not be careful. Not avoid. But beware. Be on your guard against greed of every kind. Yet we live in a society which conditions us to wanting that which we do not need. In fact, the pressures often become so great that our wants become our needs. Our very identity finds its basis in a particular type of clothing with a particular type of label preferably now visibly shown, driving a particular type of car, living in a particular type of house and in a particular type of neighborhood, even in attending a particular type of church. And on and on and on. In an article entitled, "Does Money Buy Happiness?" Richard A. Easterlin, professor of Economics at the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce states that each person acts on the assumption that more money will bring more happiness. And indeed if he does get more money and others do not, his happiness will increase. But Professor Easterlin hastens to add that when everyone acts on this assumption and incomes generally increase, no one on the average feels better off. He draws the conclusion that each person goes on, generation after generation unaware of the self-defeating process in which he is caught up. Beware, be on your guard against greed of every kind. For when a person has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life. What gives you life? What nourishes you? What gives you strength? What do you really value? What are your real needs? These may be some of the most important questions that each one of us faces throughout our life. The parable in today's text is often called The Rich Fool. This man had so much grain stored up that he didn't know what to do with it all. His biggest problem was storage, so he built more barns and prepared to sit back, eat, drink and be merry. But God entered the picture to say that his time was up and He posed to this rich man the same problem posed in Ecclesiastes. Who will get your goods? The

implication in the story is that the man had gathered all these things to himself. He had shared with no one and had no one with whom he could share after his death. Every one of us has to deal at some point in our life with our legacy to others. Perhaps a good test of life's meaning is to think about your feelings towards that which you leave to others after you are gone or to turn the question around. How do we receive? How do we receive that which those go before us may offer to us? When one of our closest friends was killed in an automobile accident before his 50th birthday, he didn't have a chance to carefully decide what he would leave to others. What he left to others was very very little in material goods. But rather he left an inspiration because of his life lived for social justice and memories of his unique capability to help people laugh at even the most common things. His legacy to me was a book, a book by Howard Thurman who I understand has been with you. In this book, he had underlined significant passages and so now I have from him that which he shared of his most important insights and wisdom. There's no greater gift that one can leave to another than the gift of ideas. Jesus' parable of the rich fool must be viewed in the context of Jesus' total ministry. In a study book called *The Parables of Jesus: Glimpses of a New Age*, we find some insights by the author, Neal Fisher into the meaning of parables. The parable refers to the age to come which is happening that forever alludes us and yet is near at hand. They unveil a future which already is making an impact upon the present situation. The new age is like the experience of a person walking on a dark, deserted road who suddenly glimpses the otherwise obscure surroundings in a flash of lightning. In an instant, the countryside is suddenly splashed with light. Everything comes into view. The image of the surroundings is seared upon the mind. Because of that glimpse, the person who continues walking through the darkness is very aware of the reality that lies behind and ahead. The parables thus do not detail for us exactly what we are to do but they suggest what is possible and fitting now that God has acted decisively in history. The message of the New Testament is at the time through which we pass has been fractured by light. Even as we live among the marks of the old age, we are beginning to experience the new age. The two ages are in conflict. In Jesus Christ, the new age is present. And it is in this new age that we glimpse a reality expressed in the parables. God is calling us to a new age, an age where things of the spirit outweigh material possessions. On a global scale, God is calling us to seriously reckon with the extreme imbalance of resources between the rich and the poor. Between the developed and the developing nations. Between our expenditure for arms and munitions as compared to our expenditures for human services. Could it be that the modern day rich fool is no small farmer, but rather the rich nations who build bigger and bigger weapons that need bigger and bigger storage systems, that need bigger and bigger surveillance capabilities. Let us look briefly at this imbalance. In 1980, military spending for the whole world will reach \$500 billion or \$1.5 billion per day or \$1.5 million per minute. Even 10 years ago, military expenses throughout the world were running at two and a half times that which nations spent on health care. One and a half times that spent on education. 30 times the total of all official and unofficial economic aid granted by developed to developing countries. In the United States, 47% of our federal taxes this year will go for war-related expenditures. For the average paying, tax-paying person who pays \$2100 in federal taxes, \$987 of this will go to the military budget. At the Riverside Church in New York City, a survey showed that members who were polled paid four times the amount of their church pledge to the Pentagon budget last year. No one of us wishes to face the specter of a nuclear holocaust, yet in our all-consuming desire for security, be it personal security or national security, we have placed ourselves in a situation where we have created an absolutely vulnerable condition for ourselves and for the planet. The most powerful nations on earth have fallen into the terrible trap of trying to build security by accumulating ever greater wealth and power, supported by means of destruction

beyond our imagination. In his widely-discussed book, *The Emerging Order: God in an Age of Scarcity*, the author, Jeremy Rifkin, describes a future where there are two potential ethics emerging to confront a world of shrinking natural resources. One is an ethic which values the struggle of each against all to acquire the control of existing resources, an ethic that's applied on both the personal and the global scale. The second possible ethic leads to an epic where cooperation between human beings and between the human race and nature become the prevailing norm. The second choice is the only one which will allow us to survive as a human race and is certainly the only one with a Christian essence. Samuel Pizar, who is an international lawyer and one of the youngest survivors of Hitler's concentration camps wrote in his memoirs recently published: Must everyone have an Auschwitz first or can those who have experienced only normal life also understand that the sacrifices required to cope with some of the world's problems are much less than they suppose. But that the danger involved in ignoring any of them are infinitely greater than they can imagine. Yet our present experience in the United States suggest that as economic resources decrease, the economic fears that each one of us faces intensify and our social responsibility decreases. Political leaders and platforms seem to lead us into some mythical past, based on our insecurity. And some notion that things were better when women were in their proper place. When we could all drive fast and big cars and when we could sleep better at night because of promises of an ever-increasing military arsenal. The really urgent questions of our day are neither addressed by political leaders nor by the mass media in its attempt to provide some analysis. In the passage that follows the parable of the rich fool, Jesus talks with His disciples about the Christian lifestyle. Listen to His words in the context of the condition that faces us today. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat nor about your body, what you shall put on. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouses nor barns and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds and which of you, by being anxious, can add a cubit to his span of life? In the gospel of Matthew, the ravens are the birds of heaven. They don't symbolize idleness but they do symbolize freedom from anxiety. The challenge to us is not to be like the ravens. That would be impossible. But to consider the ravens. On a personal level, this means an ongoing and careful examination of our values, our lifestyle and our faith. The ravens are a beacon to us to develop our inner resources and to move our inner life to new and deeper directions. Above all, to reclaim God and things of the Spirit as the center of our life. Corporately, the raven is a beacon to us, leading us to the creation of a society where a simpler lifestyle is encouraged rather than discouraged. To a spirit of cooperation and sharing rather than competition and control. Where conservation rather than consumerism is a way of life. Let the raven be a beacon to us to create a society where no one has to be anxious about the future as an elderly person, trapped in poor health and poverty. A society where meaningful work and full employment is a viable national goal. As Christians, we basically have two choices to consider in the decades that lie ahead. Our first option is to withdraw from facing the needs that we see around us. To find ways to maintain our personal survival and to support those policies and practices which primarily protect our own particular lifestyle. Our churches can become sanctuaries that protect us from facing the issues and problems that confront contemporary society. Or we can join together and with others in the development of a community-oriented approach, we can meet the problems head on and develop a new vision of what society can be. We can search for a new definition of the common good. Key to the development of a new vision of society is the Genesis account of creation. Theologians of all types are calling forth new understandings by which they reject the concept of man's dominion over nature and dominion over the earth, which has justified a manipulation and

exploitation of natural resources. We are redefining the concept of dominion to see the concept of stewardship as fundamental. If we truly accept the notion that God's creation is good, that it is orderly, that all creation is related, then those actions which harm God's creation or manipulate the order of creation become actions which challenge the very nature of God. In this sense, God is logically challenging both the rich fool and the rich nations. For by their actions, they have denied the existence of God and the purpose that God intended for humankind. If we are to begin along the road of the new creation, the road set forth in the creation story and illuminated further by Jesus' life and teachings, we are called to reexamine the assumptions on which we operate at every level. According to Jeremy Rifkin, in his extensive examination of the creation story, this new understanding, if accepted as a Christian worldview, could bring about a second reformation of Protestantism. Yes, to consider the ravens does compel us to go against the grain of many of the pressures that faced us, both inwardly and outwardly. But for Christians, this is both the challenge and the promise. As in the story of Noah, it was the dove that symbolized God's promise to the people of faith. May we too have such faith so that we can move forward together in the future that waits us. Let us pray. O God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, be with each one of us in our struggles to be whole people. Guide us in the knowledge of Your creation, its beauty, its wonder and its meaning. Instill in us an even deeper respect for Your natural order and our responsibility to be good stewards, not only to the environment but in our human resources and relationships. Guide us in all our days to know more fully who we are as a people of faith. Amen. (organ music) ♪ Be Thou my vision ♪ ♪ O Lord of my heart ♪ ♪ Naught be all else to me ♪ ♪ Save that Thou art ♪ ♪ Thou my best thought ♪ ♪ By day or by night ♪ ♪ Waking or sleeping ♪ ♪ Thy presence my light ♪ ♪ Be Thou my wisdom ♪ ♪ And Thou my true Word ♪ ♪ I ever with Thee ♪ ♪ And Thou with me, Lord ♪ ♪ Thou my great Father ♪ ♪ And I Thy true son ♪ ♪ Thou in me dwelling ♪ ♪ And I with Thee one ♪ ♪ Riches I heed not ♪ ♪ Nor man's empty praise ♪ ♪ Thou mine inheritance ♪ ♪ Now and always ♪ ♪ Thou and Thou only first ♪