

(bright organ music)

- Good morning, and welcome to this service of worship on the 14th Sunday after Pentecost here in Duke Chapel. We're glad that you're with us. Call your attention to the various announcements in the bulletin, particularly two events being held this week. The discussion of Columbus on a Mission from God, and also Saturday the Duke Chapel Gleaning Day. Information about those events can be found in the bulletin. Also, if you've not filled out the information sheet, we invite you to do so today. Tear it out and drop it into the plate so that we can have a better knowledge of you. Today's offering in its entirety will go to the American Red Cross for Hurricane Andrew relief. Please mark your checks accordingly. Let us worship God. (choir singing)

- Please stand. Join me in the greeting. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Group: And also with you.

- The risen Christ is with us.

Group: Praise the Lord. (organ music) ♪ When in our music God is glorified ♪ ♪ And adoration leaves no room for pride ♪ ♪ It is as though the whole creation cried ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ How oft, in making music, we have found ♪ ♪ A new dimension in the world of sound ♪ ♪ As worship moved us to a more profound ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ So has the Church, in liturgy and song ♪ ♪ In faith and love, through centuries of wrong ♪ ♪ Borne witness to the truth in every tongue ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ And did not Jesus sing a psalm that night ♪ ♪ When utmost evil strove against the light ♪ ♪ Then let us sing, for whom he won the fight ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Let every instrument be tuned for praise ♪ ♪ Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise ♪ ♪ And may God give us faith to sing always ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Let us pray together. Immortal invisible God overall, we quake before your creative energy so far beyond our knowing, and evident beyond our willingness to perceive. We live in your presence whether or not we acknowledge you and we are subject to your rule, whether or not we choose to follow your way. Encounter us in this hour that we may not mistake our prejudices and preferences for your will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together the prayer for illumination.

Group: Open our hearts and minds, oh God. By the power of your Holy Spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we might hear with joy what you say to us this day, amen.

- The first reading is taken from the 38th chapter of Genesis. It happened in that time that Judah went down

from his brothers and settled near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He married her and went in to her. She conceived and bore a son, whom she named Er. Again she conceived and bore a son whom she named Onan. Yet again she conceived, and she bore a son whom he named Shelah. She was in Chezib when she bore him. Now, Judah took a wife for his firstborn son Er whose name was Tamar, but Er was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death. And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, "and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, "and raise up your brother's offspring." But Onan knew that since the offspring would not be his, he would not come into her. Since Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went into her, and would not raise up the offspring of his brother. What Onan did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death, also, and Judah said to Tamar, "remain in your father's house "as a widow." In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter died, and when Judah's time of mourning was over, he went up to Timnah, to his sheep shearers. He and his friend Hirah, the Adullamite. When Tamar was told, "your father-in-law is going "up to Timnah to shear his sheep," she took off her widow's garments, put on a veil, wrapped herself up, and sat down at the entrance of Enaim, which was on the road to Timnah. She saw that Shelah had grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute for she had covered her face. He went over to her on the road and said, "Come, let me come into you." And she said, "what will you give me if you may come into me?" And he said, "I will send a kid from the flock," and she said, "only if you give me a pledge "until you send it," and he said, "what pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "your signet "and your cord and the staff "that is in your hand." And he gave them to her, and he went into her, and she conceived by him. And she got up and went away, took off her veil, and put on the garments of a widow. Now, when Judah sent the kid by his friend Hirah, the Adullamite, so to recover the pledge from his wife Hirah could not find her. He asked the townspeople, "where is the temple prostitute "who was on the wayside near to Enaim?" The townspeople replied, "no prostitute was here." Hirah returned to Judah and said, "I have not found her. "Moreover, the townspeople said there was no prostitute here." Judah said, "let her keep the things as her own. "Otherwise, we will be laughed at. "You see, I sent the kid and you could not find her." About three months later, Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore, "and moreover she is pregnant as a result of her whoredom." Judah said, "bring her out and let her be burned." As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law saying it was the owner of these that made me pregnant, and she said, "take note, please, whose these are. "This signet and this cord and this staff." And Judah recognized them, and said, "she is more "in the right than I." This is the word of God.

Group: Thanks be to God.

- Seven, verses 11 through 20 found on page 798 in your hymnal. Please stand and sing responsibly the Psalm and Glory. (organ music) ♪ I will remember the deeds of the Lord ♪ ♪ I will remember your wonders of old ♪ ♪ I will ponder all of your work ♪ ♪ and meditate on your mighty deeds ♪ ♪ Your way, O God, is holy ♪ ♪ What god is great like our God ♪ ♪ You are the God who works wonders ♪ ♪ you manifested your might among the peoples ♪ ♪ You with your arm redeemed your people ♪ ♪ the descendants of Jacob and Joseph ♪ ♪ When the waters saw you, O God ♪ ♪ when the waters saw you, they were afraid ♪ ♪ the very deeps trembled ♪ ♪ The clouds poured out water ♪ ♪ the skies gave forth thunder ♪ ♪ your arrows flashed on every

side ♪ ♪ The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind ♪ ♪ your lightnings illumined the world ♪ ♪ the earth trembled and shook ♪ ♪ Your way was through the sea ♪ ♪ your path through the great waters ♪ ♪ yet your footprints were unseen ♪ ♪ You led your people like a flock ♪ ♪ by the hand of Moses and Aaron ♪ ♪ Oh, glory be to you, Creator ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ our savior ♪ (group singing) ♪ As it was a time began ♪ (group singing)

- This reading is taken from the first letter of Paul. To Timothy, chapter one starting with the 12th verse. I am grateful to Christ Jesus, our Lord who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formally a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed from me with a faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. His saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost, but for that very reason, I received mercy so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience making me an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life. To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, the honor and glory forever and ever, amen. This is the word of the Lord.

Group: Thanks be to God. (organ music) (choir singing)

- I told you that in September we were going to just work our way right through the Joseph stories, Genesis 37 to Genesis 50, but those of you who happened to be here the last couple of Sundays know that I lied. We had a sermon on Genesis 37 that was Joseph and his infamous coat and his outrageous dreams, but then we jumped over to Genesis 39 and 40, and we had a sermon about Joseph down in Egypt. And what happened to Genesis 38? Well, to my knowledge, there has never been a sermon preached on Genesis 38 in the history of the church. I've certainly not preached a sermon on it, and I expect you've never heard a sermon on it, but you're about to. You were there. This will be something you will be able to tell your grandchildren about. (audience laughing) I was there for a sermon on Genesis 38. Of this text, the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has said, Brueggemann who has preached frequently from this pulpit. Of this text he says, "this peculiar chapter just stands alone. "Without connection to its context it is isolated, enigmatic. "It is not evident that it provides any significant "theological resource. "It is difficult to know "in what context it might be "of value for theological exposition." Then Brueggemann adds, "the major problem "in dealing with this chapter is that even close study "does not make its intention evident." To which I say good. I don't have to study it closely. It's a perfect text for a sermon. (audience laughing) It is such an odd chapter. We were supposed to be having a series of stories about Joseph, and here is a chapter that doesn't even mention Joseph. Odd. Into this wonderfully constructed, tight, and also instructive saga of Joseph is inserted this marvelously uninformative story of a woman named Tamar. Tamar who dupes her father-in-law, Judah, into having sex with her. I'm aware that there are many young people here today, and I'm aware that many of you no matter what your age have come here to chapel expecting to be morally leaned on, ethically edified, to be given some point to go that will help you through the week, that will make you a better person. Well, forget it. I can't find anything in this chapter that will help with that. This strange story is of a woman, but as it begins we notice that she appears to be a very unimportant character in the story. As if she is some sort of casual, just a passive bystander into a real story about a man, a man named Judah and his friend Hirah, and Judah's sons Er, Onan, and Shelah. Maybe somebody out there wonders, did Judah ever have any

daughters? Well, we don't know, because the story is not interested in daughters. It doesn't say anything about daughters, it doesn't say anything about wives. This story is not interested in daughters and wives. It's about men. It's about men who are makers of history and doers of important things and heads of families. But that's just the problem. Family, because we know that this section of Genesis is dealing with God's determination to get a family. God wants a family, but this family keeps messing up and things keep going wrong. It's a story about a family. Judah has given a wife named Tamar to his eldest son named Er who was appropriately named Er. Er does something that angers the Lord and is struck dead, so Judah follows the Levirate marriage laws. Leviticus 25, which says that if you've got a man who is married and he dies without issue you are to turn over the widow to the next eldest brother. That brother must marry the widow, must impregnate her, and provide an heir. It being inconceivable that this widow might inherit her husband's goods. You will note that here in the beginning of the story, nobody lingers much over Tamar. Nobody wonders what she's thinking throughout all these successions of funerals and marriages. We wonder, perhaps, what's going on with her, this widow, this bereft woman alone and vulnerable, but nobody ponders what Tamar is thinking during all of this shuffling around from one unproductive brother to unfruitful brother. Judah tells Onan, next in line, to go take Tamar and make children, but Onan disobeyed. Committing what the bible calls a shameful act, birth control, because Onan knew that the issue would not really be his, and of course Onan is struck dead. Generations of little boys got confusing messages about the sin of Onanism. Now, in case you've been keeping score, we've got two weddings and two funerals here and no heir. After the last funeral, Judah says to Tamar, Look, go on back to your father's house, woman. Maybe when my third son grows up, I mean, anyway you're bad luck. You go back. Tamar is just cast aside. She's just sent back to her father's house, and what do you expect her future is going to be? Alone, childless, a widow. It's a bleak future of dismal old age awaiting Tamar. End of story. Tragic? Yes. Dead end. But if you know much about the history of women in most cultures, you have to at least admit that though it's not a particularly original story, it is a very typical story. This is always the end of the story for women in any patriarchal culture. Dependent, mostly valued as child bearers and husband carers. A mere backdrop to the larger story, what we call history about what men will do and will not do. It's one of those stories, but because this is the bible where nearly anything can happen and often does, you will note this story continues, and suddenly Tamar moves from being someone just waiting in the wings, shuffle back and forth to become the chief actor in the story. Judah's wife dies. Judah, the father-in-law whose sons were not much help to Tamar, and Judah happens to be over in Timnah for the sheep shearing season, and after the sheep are sheared, Judah goes out on the town with the boys for a night on the town, and I really hate that you first year students must hear this, but it's in the bible. So Tamar at last arises out of her patriarchal, culturally induced passivity, and she takes matters in hand. She throws off these mourning clothes. She dabs a bit of night of ecstasy behind each ear. She puts on this veil over her face, and she heads for the red light district of Timnah. Well, when Judah comes through there he sees her, but of course he doesn't recognize that his daughter-in-law is there before him, because of this veil. The haggle over a price for such services. One young goat. But Tamar having dealt with men in this family before asks Judah to leave a little collateral. His signet ring, his belt, and his staff until he pays up with his goat, and it's a done deal. A few days later when Judah's friend Hirah shows up with this goat looking for this perfumed Harlot to pay, he can't find her. He goes back to Judah. He says nobody's seen this Harlot with the veil. Judah says, look, let her keep the ring and the belt and the staff, this woman could make a fool out of me. So he goes home after his escapades at the sheep shearing convention with a hangover, pants sagging without a belt, no staff, no

ring. Sadder but wiser, and maybe that was supposed to be the end of the story, but this is a bible story. It keeps going on. Six months later, Judah gets some gossip that his ex-daughter-in-law, Tamar is pregnant, because she's been working part time as a prostitute. Well, Judah is indignant. An upstanding progenitor of God's Holy People Israel, a future patriarch of the church. Judah can't have his daughter-in-law, ex or not, running about embarrassing the family name. In a singular act of righteous indignation, Judah says bring her back over here, and we'll burn her. That ought to teach her a lesson. They bring back Tamar, but now she's wearing these maternity clothes rather than that black veil, and they say do you have anything to say before we set fire to you and make an example for all our women folk? Tamar says well I do just have one thing to say. All I know is that the man to whom belongs all of this stuff is the father of my child, and with that she produces this masonic ring with a big J on it, and this large belt buckle with a J on that, and the staff. Judah says oops. (audience laughing) Okay, I think court is over now, and you can put away the torches and the gasoline, and this woman has got more right than I. Now, let's translate it more accurately is this woman is a lot more righteous than I. That's an amazing statement for somebody like Judah to make about Tamar. Unmarried, a widow, childless, she has no rights. She is outside the law. She is outside legal recourse. That ought to be the end of the story. The legal, proper, appropriate end, and that story's got a moral. All right all you disenfranchised people on the bottom, you better obey the rules, or you're going to get burned. Of course, sometimes people on the bottom note that most of the rules are made by people on top. But as I said, hey, this is the bible, and so this is not the end of the story. The story moves on. The story moves on to, in Walter Brueggemann's words, a fresh definition of righteousness. Who is the guilty one now? Who is on trial now? Well, show him the ring, the staff, the belt. Maybe it'll teach him a lesson. In this story, surprise, Tamar is vindicated. She is made righteous. She bares twins named Perez and Zerach. The family of Israel is going to be continued. The family will continue. God is going to get a family, but not in the polite, respectable, bourgeois, middle class way we thought. It won't be contended, it won't be continued through Judah's efforts and his self righteousness. It's going to be preserved through the crafty hutspace of a gutsy woman named Tamar. If there is a moral to be had here, if there is some point of edification for all of us good, church-going people, it can't be the one we wanted, because Tamar has committed all of those sins, which good, bourgeois, church people condemn. Lying, deception, illicit sex. Judah reacts as at first the world always reacts on these occasions, indignant condemnation. Not everybody who grew up in the 60's was a draft evader and using mind altering drugs and illicit sex. We're not like that. When the tables are turned, does it remind some of you of a story you may have heard from second Samuel, a story about King David, Righteous King David? Prophet Nathan comes in, tells him a little story. There was a man, he had all these flocks, but he wasn't satisfied with that. He went down to his poor neighbor, and he took this one little lamb that that man loved, and he killed it. Served it up for his Cronies. King David is filled with righteous indignation. That guy ought to hang for that, he says, and then Nathan says oh, thou art the man. Court was over. As I remember, in that story a woman was involved also. Note that this story does not glorify Tamar or exalt her action. That would be too much, but you do have to admire the way that she takes matters and Judah in hand. The way this woman wrenches a future for herself out of the clutches of male oppression. Masquerading as religious propriety. Masquerading as the way God wants the world to work. She doesn't whine about her circumstances. She doesn't join the ranks of the perpetual victims. She doesn't just passively accept the world as it comes. No, she goes out and she wheels and she deals. Recklessly risking all, and thus I think suggests a new definition of righteousness. You gotta hand it to Tamar. One of you was telling me about your home church. You said that it was a conservative bible believing church. A church

which had taken stands against abortion, and against immorality, and in favor of marriage, but then you said when the pastor's son got his girlfriend pregnant, and then confessed it on Sunday morning and said they were going to get married, the Board of Deacons met that evening and fired the pastor. Well, we've got our righteousness, and I know somebody who's a school teacher teaching in one of the most poverty stricken areas of Appalachia. He doesn't go to church, though. He says he doesn't feel comfortable in church, because he is not, how shall I say it, of the same orientation as most of the people at church, and he was saying that when he was home for summer vacation he went with his parents to their church and in the sermon the minister there ridiculed, said things about people who weren't of that congregation's orientation. That's our righteousness. Now, I ask you why ... Now why would we ... Dean Wassalick may ask me this tomorrow morning. Why would you bring up a story like this with a group of people like us, particularly here early in the school year when we need to have a united front against student behavior? Why would you bring up an embarrassing story like this one? A story, I may add, that never mentions God, except of course as the one that killed Tamar's first two husbands. (audience laughing) Why would you spend a whole important Sunday in church discussing this kind of woman? Forget Tamar. Oh savvy? Yes. Been around the block a couple of times? Yes. Wise in the ways of the world? Yes. But for all of that a lying, deceptive, Harlot. Why bring her up? Why bring her up and on a Sunday, too? Well, because Matthew brings her up. Matthew, yeah that's right, Saint Matthew brings her up. First gospel of the New Testament. Matthew first chapter beginning at the third verse. Matthew begins his gospel by saying this is the book of the story of Jesus, and then he goes back and tells you about Jesus' family. This is the book of the story of Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham, Abraham conceived Issac. Notice all men. Who was the father of Jacob. Who was the father of Judah. Who with Tamar, conceived twins. The only woman to make it into Jesus' family tree at this point is Tamar. Now, the story can be told. The great, great, great-grandmother of Jesus was Tamar. If we hadn't had Tamar, we would never have had Jesus. So although God is never mentioned in this story, we have a hunch that God may be there behind the scenes, waiting in the wings, even in this story, busy working out his purposes for a family. God is going to get a family, but not through the people or the ways we good, righteous people expected. So when Jesus called forth a new family called church. A new family through baptism, based on a new gutsy kind of pushy righteousness, wouldn't Jesus' great-grandmother have been proud? (organ music) ♪ Amazing grace how sweet the sound ♪ ♪ That saved a wretch like me ♪ ♪ I once was lost, but now I am found ♪ ♪ Was blind, but now I see ♪ ♪ 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear ♪ ♪ And grace my fears relieved ♪ ♪ How precious did that grace appear ♪ ♪ The hour I first believed ♪ ♪ Through many dangers, toils and snares ♪ ♪ I have already come ♪ ♪ 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far ♪ ♪ And grace will lead me home ♪ ♪ The Lord hath promised good to me ♪ ♪ His word my hope secures ♪ ♪ He will my shield and portion be ♪ ♪ As long as life endures ♪ ♪ Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail ♪ ♪ And mortal life shall cease ♪ ♪ I shall possess, within the veil ♪ ♪ A life of joy and peace ♪ ♪ When we've been there ten thousand years ♪ ♪ Bright shining as the sun ♪ ♪ We've no less days to sing God's praise ♪ ♪ Than when we first begun ♪

- The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Be seated. Oh Lord of love who instructs us in all the ways we can be taught, and who seeks us

in all the ways we can be found. You are our teacher without whose instruction we would constantly be confused, and our guide without whose companionship we would daily go astray. Guide us and teach us now, as we seek to hear your word for us this day. Lord, in your mercy Hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- We give thanks for the generosity and mercy you have shown to your people throughout the ages. Not only did you give our ancestors the law for shaping their life, but you gave them your love for reshaping their law. Help us learn from their mistakes and profit from their insights. Lord, in your mercy Hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- Lord, we confess that like Judah, we are quick to judge others and to excuse ourselves. As Tamar exposed Judah's sinfulness and injustice, help us also see and acknowledge our own injustices. Lord, in your mercy Hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- Forgive us for the ways we participate in social policies and systems that oppress women and children. Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- Forgive us for tolerating a racial and class system built on the backs of the powerless people in our society. Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- Forgive us for the ways we harden our hearts and close our ears to the cries of the suffering who fill our hospitals and jails, who lie in alleyways and parks, who cower in their homes in fear of loved ones. Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- Forgive us for our callous response to people struck by tragedy in LA, Florida, Louisiana, Nicaragua. Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- And forgive us for our tendency to justify our actions while constantly seeking to blame others. The Democrats, the Republicans, the poor, the rich, those other people we blame for all our ills. Help us acknowledge our own sin and our complicity with sin, and seek your forgiveness and healing. Lord in your

mercy hear our prayer.

Group: Hear our prayer.

- Oh, Lord, this saying is sure and worthy of acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners like Judah and Tamar and Paul. We stand before you in need of your mercy. We give thanks that we can come before you with confidence that whatever our sin, your forgiveness is greater. As far as the east is from the west, you have promised to remove our sin from us. You give us your forgiveness, and you make us righteous. We give you thanks for your amazing grace. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. God seeks our steadfast love rather than our acts of duty. Let us make a true offering of ourselves and our gifts. (organ music) (choir singing) ♪ Praise God from Whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise God all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Praise God above ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Let us pray. Thank you God for your amazing grace that continues to unfold in our lives. We are grateful that you have brought us to this hour, and we accept your mercy and seek to respond to others with a generosity you have shown us. Receive our offerings as symbols of our larger commitment as your disciples. Use them to relieve the suffering of those who have lost so much through Hurricane Andrew. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Let us pray together as Jesus taught us.

Group: 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, 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. (organ music) ♪ Immortal invisible, God only wise ♪ ♪ In light inaccessible hid from our eyes ♪ ♪ Most blessed most glorious, the Ancient of Days ♪ ♪ Almighty victorious Thy great name we praise ♪ ♪ Unresting unhasting and silent as light ♪ ♪ Nor wanting nor wasting Thou rulest in might ♪ ♪ Thy justice like mountains high soaring above ♪ ♪ Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love ♪ ♪ To all life Thou givest, to both great and small ♪ ♪ In all life Thou livest, the true life of all ♪ ♪ We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree ♪ ♪ And wither and perish, but nought changeth Thee ♪ ♪ Great Father of Glory, pure Father of Light ♪ ♪ Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight ♪ ♪ All laud we would render, O help us to see ♪ ♪ 'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee ♪

- May the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always, amen. (choir singing) (organ music)