

(choir singing)

Videographer: You can step back there if you want to.

- Good morning, and welcome to this service on the second Sunday in the Christian season of Lent. Our service has begun with music from the UNC Wilmington Concert Choir. Mr. Joe Hickman is their director. We're delighted that these young people have come across the state to be with us, and to help lead our worship this morning, and we welcome them to the chapel. Next Sunday at the conclusion of the service, the annual Durham crop walk for world hunger, will leave from the steps of the chapel at 1 o'clock, and we invite you to participate in that worthy activity. Again this morning, we welcome those of you who are worshiping with us in the patient rooms of Duke Hospital. We have been enjoying this extension of the ministry of the chapel and thank you for your correspondence with us, and we welcome you to this service of worship. Our preacher this Sunday is Bishop Roy Nichols of the United Methodist Church. Bishop Nichols's last episcopal area of service was in New York. He is now in Oakland, California, where he is directing a project on church growth for the United Methodist Church. He is a gifted preacher and a popular speaker and well-known leader of the church. We are proud to invite him back, to welcome him back to Duke Chapel this Sunday, as a James T. Cleland preacher. Now let us continue our worship. (organ music)
(choir singing)

- The season of Lent is a time for introspection and reflection. When we gather to praise God, we remember the costs which God has paid for our salvation, and we also remember the gaps in our lives, the distance between God's will for us and the way we live. Therefore, let us begin by confessing our sin before God and one another. Be seated. Oh Almighty God, give us grace to approach thee at this time with penitent and believing hearts. We confess that we have sinned against thee, and are not worthy to be called thy children, yet do thou in mercy, keep us as thy own. Grant us true repentance, and forgive us all our sins. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. Hear the good news, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That is God's own proof of his love towards us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Church Members: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven, Amen.

- Let us pray.

Church Members: Open our hearts and minds oh God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that is the word as rite. We might hear with joy what you say to us this day, Amen.

- The first lesson is taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a slave to all. That I might win the more. To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might

win those under the law. To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law. Not being without law toward God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law. To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means, save some. I do it all of the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race, all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air, but I pummel my body and subdue it. Lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified. This ends the reading of the first lesson.

- The psalter is number 572, let us stand as we read responsively. Be merciful to me oh God, be merciful to me.

Church Members: For my soul trusteth in thee.

- In the shadow of thy wings, I will take refuge.

Church Members: The source of destruction has come.

- I cry to God most high.

Church Members: to God who provides his service for me.

- He will send from heaven and save me.

Church Members: God shall send forth his mercy and truth.

- Be exalted oh God above the heavens.

Church Members: Let thy glory be above all the earth.

- My heart is steadfast oh God, my heart is steadfast.

Church Members: I will sing and give praise.

- I will gave thanks to thee oh Lord among the peoples.

Church Members: I will sing praises of thee among nations.

- For thy steadfast love is great to the heavens.

Church Members: Thy truth unto the clouds.

- Be exalted oh God above the heavens.

Church Members: Let thy glory be above all the earth.

- Be seated.

- The second lesson is taken from Paul's letter to the Romans. What then shall we say about Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh. For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say. Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Now one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift, but as the workers' doom. And to one who does not work but trust him who justifies the ungodly, faith is reckoned as righteousness. So also David pronounces a blessing upon the person to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those, who iniquities are forgiven, and who sins are covered. Blessed are those against whom the Lord will not reckon their sin. The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherence of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace, and be guaranteed to all their descendants. Not only to the adherents of the law, but also to those who share the faith of Abraham. For he is the father of us all, as it is written, I have made you the father of many nations. In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence, the things that do not exist. This ends the reading of the second lesson. (organ music) (choir singing)

- The Gospel is taken from John. Now there was a man of the Pharisee's named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God." "For no one can do these signs that you do, "except by the power of God." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly I say to you, "unless one is born anew, "one cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can someone be born "who is old?" "Can one enter a second time the womb of one's mother, "and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly I say to you, "unless one is born of water and the spirit, "one cannot enter the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, "and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. "Do not marvel that I said to you, "you must be born anew. "The wind blows where it wills, "and you hear the sound of it, "but you do not know whence it comes or whether it goes. "So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit." Nicodemus said to Jesus, "How can this be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, "and yet, you do not understand this? "Truly, truly I say to you, "We speak of what we know, "and bear witness to what we have seen, "but you do not receive our testimony. "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, "how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? "No one has ascended into heaven but "He who descended from heaven, the son of man. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, "so must the son of man be lifted up. "That whoever believes in Him, may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish, "but have eternal life. "For God sent the son into the world, "not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." This ends the reading of the Gospel.

- May we bow our heads in prayer. Oh Lord our God, make acceptable unto thyself, all that we say, all that

we do, all that we sing, and all that we think. In the name of the one God, father and mother of us all, the son and the Holy Spirit, so be it, and Amen. A special word of greeting to those of you who are present in the chapel this morning, and to those in the hospital who may be listening and looking, special words of greeting, and grace to you. Saint Paul took his religion utterly serious. When he thought the Christians were the enemies of God, he persecuted them and did all that he could to destroy the church. But when he became a believer, he turned all of that energy into a new channel. To construct and to support his growing church. The Damascus road experience is familiar to most of us, who have done a little bible study, riding on his horse on one of his persecution missions, Paul was struck down and a light from heaven illumined the place where he fell. And a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me. "It is hard for thee to kick against the bricks." And finally in compliance, realizing that the awesome presence of the one God was beaming upon him, Paul said, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" Once converted, it appeared he tried as hard as he could to compensate for all of those years of his ruthless errors. It is interesting the way he describes Christian experience, it's a contest. In one place it's wrestling, in another it's boxing, in another we are soldiers engaged in a war. He talks about putting on the whole armor of God. And in another, he pictures us as if we were long distance runners. The living bible paraphrases the punchlines of that First Epistle read this morning from first Corinthians like this. "Run the race to win. Run straight for the goal "and run with purpose in every step." Now Saint Paul was not talking about a personal victory in his admonition toward winning. He was talking about a community victory, the victory of the kingdom of God, the victory of the will of God on earth. Some modern theologians have attempted to reflect it with some kind of psycho-analytical approach to Paul to see if his compulsiveness suggested some sort of spiritual paranoia. For he always seemed to be striking out at something. But Paul, like all of the authentic prophets of God, felt that he was continually struggling against evil principalities and powers against the rulers of darkness in this world. And against spiritual wickedness in high places like, the Proverbial Man of La Mancha. Paul was always riding out in contest against the powers of evil. But there have always been laid back Christians who looked for comfort in the church. Wondering what this holy running and holy wrestling and holy boxing and holy fighting and holy rolling is all about. Why can't we just be holy without all that heavenly exercise? Well, all this heavenly exercise is about the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. To redeem the future from the power and the penalty, of human sin, in the name of Jesus Christ. And one of my favorite cartoons is Dennis the Menace. After reading many books as you have and discovering that if you just found the right two or three paragraphs, you could have saved yourself the whole trip. Because there in, you would have found the nucleus of what the author has to say. So it's nice to look at one picture that's worth a thousand words. It's bath time, and Dennis the Menace is resisting. I'm not sure what he had against taking baths, I think mostly it was just the time that it took. But in rebuttal against his mother's persuasion and all that she was saying about the goodness and the worthwhileness of bathing with such frequency, Dennis inquired, "Why doesn't somebody invite a bath with a lifetime guarantee." All of us, I'm sure at times, have wished, I mean beyond the limits of those refreshing showers that we take from time to time, that somebody would invent something that would settle something and do it permanently. As they say in the Portuguese, "A luta continua", "but the struggle continues." Young people growing up in the college or university community, who are formulating their approaches to whatever their vocations may be, are shaping also their personal integrity. And it is never quite one and assured. I remember a friend of mine, a professor at seminary, who said to me one day, "Roy, every person has a price, "but keeps your so high, "that nobody on Earth will pay it." He was talking about personal integrity, and that none of us, no matter how strong we think we are,

from cradle to the grave, are completely protected against the possibility of its loss. Paul is explaining that in the last section of that scripture where he says, "God be merciful and strengthen me, "lest after I have preached to others, "I myself should be a castaway." There are political ventures or economic put-togethers that we work at from time to time. Victory flags are raised as if we think it was settled, but in the next generation or even before that one has passed, the same struggle appears to be engaged in all over again. And to young lovers and marrieds and friends, I think many of the couples that I council when I was pastoring in a local church, were a little dismayed at my last point. When I told them after having been pierced by the arrow of love, that love is work. And when you stop working at it, all of those dainty little affections and niceties, begin to disappear. "A luta continua", even for love, the struggle continues over and over and over again. John Wesley, the father of the people called Methodists, was an extremely tough task master. He said his central doctrine was Christian perfection, though we don't hear very much about that these days. He took his cue from Jesus, who said "Be ye perfect even as your father in Heaven is perfect". Wesley was the first to admit that he had never achieved perfection, but he was also first to admit that he was continually striving toward it. Not for the sake of His salvation, for that was already assured, but because of his gratitude to God, for God's goodness. And for those of you who are resistant to the notion of perfection, then what on Earth are you striving for? If not to be fully all that God intends for us to be. 244 years ago, on the 12th day of March, in the year 1743, John Wesley on horseback, took a journey up toward Northern England to visit a group of his parishioners in a little town called Newcastle. In his journal which he kept copiously, he kept a record of the happenings there. I don't believe the sermon was recorded, but the discontents of Brother John were placed in his little book. Because before he left Newcastle, he dismissed 64 of the saints, dismissed them. We don't do that anymore. But John not only had a way of dismissing them, but there was also a way that they could be retrieved again. There were little seminars for repenting backsliders who could come in the side door and find their places again. But do you want to hear the list of happenings that caused him to do what he did to? He dismissed for cursing and swearing, two for habitual sabbath breaking, seventeen for drunkenness, two for selling spirituous liquors, three for quarreling and brawling, one for beating his wife, three for habitual lying, four for evil speaking, and one for idleness. Well, if Brother John were here today, his list might be a little different from that one. But you understand in the context of the times, what he was after. But the interesting thing is that 29 of the people that he dismissed, in addition to those that I numbered, hadn't done anything bad, but John couldn't find anything good that they had done either. And so they suffered the same fate with all the rest. I remember as a child, on the eastern shore of Maryland where I was born in a little clapboard church by the county road, watching the class leaders interrogating their members, who are expected to give forth in the presence of their colleagues and all the saints two things: one, their Christian experience. What has happened to you lately that would assure you of the pervasive influence of the grace of God in your life? And two: what is your determination? What are you going to do good in the future? This was always the most important part of the testimonies. I recall one good lady who after an all diligence laying before the saints, her determination. She would close with tears running down her face saying, "brothers and sisters pray for me because "I'm running for my life". Those in the fellowship understood clearly what she meant. The seriousness of her intent. For redeeming the future is preventing the repetition of past mistakes. It is setting a new course for ourselves in God's name. It is going on to accomplish the will of God in the world. I suspect if John Wesley and Saint Paul were alive today, they would be putting some questions to the saints that might run like this. What are you doing about the present state of moral and ethical degradation at large in the land? That is the absence of

conscious, the forgotten line between what is right and what is wrong, the adopting of personal moralities based upon what we think is good for us, in quotes, "as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else". As if any of us could do anything on Earth that didn't have some relevance to someone else. I'm involved in a project in the area of local church revitalization, which is nation wide. And the first priority that I'm putting forth in the churches based upon what I'm discovering, is our ministries to children and to youth. Considering the millions of young American children, not in the slubs alone, but in the suburbs and in the best of homes, who are growing up like pagans, who have not had any experience at all of Christian nurture, because somehow in some way, we have not been aggressive enough in trying to nurture them, turning away from our self-centered presentness. Our future is in the perfection of our children, and the hope that they have for us and for all the world for tomorrow. I have mused with some sorrow as you have no doubt, in reflecting on the statistics relating to teenage suicides. You wonder how young people, with all the energy and future and everything before them, living in the best of circumstances, though we know there must've been some interior distortions about which we are not aware, could decide they didn't want to go on. My mathematics isn't too good but one fella always prone to talk about statistics, said it's happening in our nation at the rate of 6,000 a year, and then he went on to push it and said that's one every ninety minutes. I can't believe it. If John Wesley and Saint Paul were alive today, they might be asking us, what are we doing about the threat of nuclear war? Just a few months ago, I was over in the European theater holding seminars for chaplains in the Armed Forces of the United States, on a mission for the commission of chaplains of the United Methodist Church. And one of the things that I was bad to do was to discuss the recent paper by the Council of Bishops entitled in 'Defense of Creation'. It's all about really one simple topic. The cessation of testing of nuclear weapons worldwide, the outlawing of the probable use of nuclear weapons, and the dismantling of all that exists for the protection of the future of the whole human race. I discussed this with the chaplains, many of whom had read it. At first they were a little tense thinking that the document was aimed against their vocation. Well, I don't think any of us think the world is quite safe enough to do without police forces quite yet. But I said to them when they queried me, what else would you expect the followers of Jesus Christ to say? And then as clarification came to that point, which you know you can sense in any meeting, they said to me, 'Bishop, we're here to keep the peace, because you sent us', and I could understand that. They were our sons and daughters who were doing chaplain's mission to other sons and daughters, who were in these theaters because they had been commissioned by us to keep the peace. But they they said to me, 'Bishop, somebody has 'got to win the war against war'. I had conversation with the Generals. They were gracious enough to take me up in their offices. And one tall Air Force commander looked me in the eye and said, 'Bishop I hope to God we never have to use 'the stuff we have got, because if we do, 'it'll be the closest thing to judgment day 'this world has ever seen'. I remember the phrasing of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the leader of the so-called crusade in Europe during World War II, twice President elected by the American people. And in his parting statement, to paraphrase him, he said, "We must win the war against war and who knew more about war than Eich." And then he added, "If the politicians and the governments cannot, then the people must do it themselves." If Saint Paul and John Wesley were alive today, they would probably inquire of us, what are we doing in the battle for human subsistence, which would include the issues of hunger and homelessness, and racism and pollution, which is eroding the ozone area in frightful dimensions. Oh you know, because you read the papers, no doubt daily better than I do. The uneasiness and the unrest that prevails worldwide today. We were visiting in Zimbabwe in the southern regions of South Africa. And at breakfast I was giving them the traditional American greeting, you know, 'hi' and small talk, and I was

informed by one of them, that in Zimbabwe, in the morning when we greet, one says, 'did you sleep well?'. And the other responds, 'I slept well if you slept well'. What a tremendous empathy is involved in that expression. How can I sleep well when there are so many people in so many parts of the world, who are not sleeping at all? Children, women, men in turmoil. How can the Church of Jesus Christ sleep well when so many of the children of God scattered here and 'yond, are not sleeping at all? I was looking at the TV screen some months ago. An evangelist was warning us that the clock of God is running down. There is nothing on Earth that any of us can do to stop it. The sequence of catastrophe and the impending horrendous happenings, he applauded for they predict the second coming of Christ. Well I understood a little of his theologizing, and shared with him the hope of the second coming. But when he said that we could do nothing, I was confused. Because he turned and asked us for three million dollars to finance one of his programs that he was doing overseas. And I crossed myself with all reverends, and agreed within myself that I'd not send him a cotton-pickin' penny. Because if what I give and what I do and what I pray for doesn't make any difference, then why waste all that energy and money and time. Jesus came to save us and to save the world. He didn't expect us to be a bunch of discontented losers. He taught us to pray thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. And He didn't tell us to watch the judgment day clock. He told us to go ye into all the world and make disciples. I was standing in a lawyer's office just a bit ago, and on his wall he had an interesting inscription. It simply said, "All good things come to those who wait "if you're willing to work like heaven while you're waiting". I close with this reference. Harvey Cox, a theologian from Harvard, who has done a lot to stimulate the thinking of our time, about seventeen years ago wrote a book called 'A Secular City', and I suspect on the basis of some of his meandering in the book, he thought the church would be out of business by this time, but here we are, still at it. So he wrote another book, entitled 'Religion in the Secular City'. And in this one he has a pity kind of thing that pierces. He said, "Through all the centuries, "the Church of Jesus Christ, "has made its crucifixion theology central "and that is the way it must be, for He was wounded "for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, "the chastisement of our peace was upon Him "and by His stripes, we are healed, "it is through the cross that "we perceive the meaning of grace." But Harvey says now is the time for us to raise to the same level of emphasis, the theology of the resurrection, because today, the world needs a winner. We need to announce to the world, that all that Christ has given us, the lessons, the life, the eternal dimension, the love, that is a winning message. It still has the comeuppance that can save us and can save the world. That is the race that we are in. Run the race to win. Run straight toward the goal. And run with purpose in every step. And run with patience looking unto Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of our faith. So be it, and Amen. (organ music) (choir singing)

- The Lord be with you

Church Members: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Great and loving God, you hear our prayers before we speak and answer before we even know our need. Though we cannot pray, may your spirit pray in us, drawing us to you and toward our neighbors. We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ, it begun maintained and promoted by your spirit may be true, glad, and active always, doing your will. We pray for those who serve the church in special ways, preaching and teaching, ruling and showing charity, that they may never lose heart. We pray for those who govern us, who

make and administer or judge our laws, may this country ever be a land of free and abled persons, who welcome exiles and who work for justice. We pray for poor people who are hungry or who are housed in cramped places. Increase in us and all who prosper, concern for the disinherited. We pray for sick people who suffer pain or struggle with demons in the mind, who silently cry out for healing, particularly those in the hospital of this university. Pray they be patient, brave and trusting. We pray for the dying who face final mystery. May they enjoy light and life intensely. May they keep dignity and greet death unafraid, assured of your love. We pray for people who are alone and lonely, who have no one to call an easy friendship. May they be remembered and befriended and know of your care for them. We pray for families, for parents and children and youth, may they enjoy each other. May they honor one another and forgive as happily as we are forgiven in your great mercy. Hear these prayers, which we lift up for others, Amen. As a forgiving and reconciled people, let us now in generosity and spirit, return some of God's gifts for God's work in this place. (organ music) (solo opera singer) (choir singing) (organ music) ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise him all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Praise him above ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Gracious God, we give thanks that you have granted us time and place apart, to hear your word and praise your name. We have felt your presence with us, and give thanks for your sustenance in life's way. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallow 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, of the power and the glory forever, Amen. (organ music) (choir singing)