

(organ music playing)

- Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations called forth in our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O, Lord our strength and our redeemer, amen. I have an instrument in my home, a violin that is lying on the top shelf of a bookcase in my living room. It's a beautiful instrument. The work of a young and promising violin builder in the southern part of Norway, has a very nice, slim form. And the color is light, the light of the color of natural wood. And it has a good tune. I know it has because even the most amateurish hands can lure forth some of its richness at times, but somehow the faith of that instrument makes me sad. When I look at it lying there unused or being handled by unskilled hands, misused by untrained fingers, I always think of what that instrument might have been. If it had fallen into the hands of Jascha Heifetz or Isaac Stern, they would have transformed this silent piece of wood and these idle cords into a source of endless beauty. They could have made it laugh and cry, chase the flight of a bumblebee or express the solemn requiem of a heart. They could have filled a concert hall with its soulful tune, making it explode with the fireworks of phōtismos or they could have made it entice the individual with the woes of its voice, that he'd weep the tears of the pianismos. But instead, this instrument has fallen into my hands and I cannot do a thing with it. Its richness, it's never explored. Its tune has never freed. Its soul has never released. While we were on vacation recently, two of its strings broke, I guess in sheer desperation for the treatment its getting at our house. I ought to put some new strings on it. That's the least I can do for it. But I know that this violin is going to continue to make me sad. It's the potential in it that disturbs me to think of what that instrument might've been. Sometimes I wish it had a will of its own to go somewhere and find a master who could play on it. Do you recognize, of course, that I'm speaking in a parable here? And I intend to use it as such. A parable of our life. Only that as all good parables, this one breaks down if you press it too far. But it was that we were intended to be from the beginning. We were to be His instruments, expressing in our lives the will of our master, our creator, serving Him with gladness, finding our fulfillment in such service, and returning to Him the honor and glory and praise of a heart that finds fulfillment in His service. As the Presbyterian so fittingly express it, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." It was for this purpose that God endowed man, His most precious instrument with potentials far above any other part of His creation. There's the intelligence of man by which he can investigate the secrets of his surroundings. There's this comprehension of the invisible laws informing the universe and inventiveness to use these laws. It is the strength of body and skill of hands to carry out whatever scheme he has in mind, whether he builds or destroys, travels under the Arctic ice or explores outer space. And there's creativeness beyond measure in man. In fact, and in the expression of thoughts, in form, in color, in words, in music, what an instrument that man is. As he springs from his master's hand, what potentials are there for goodness and greatness, for growth and for glory. From this perspective, you see the renaissance was right, and the enlightenment spoke the truth. Man is truly a wonderful being, the crown of creation. He ought to discover his potentials and he ought to use them to the fullest. We have no quarrel with such a view of man. Only as Christians, we want to say that the meaning of our creativeness and our endowments is to be found in God's intentions for us. It is God's man that we are, endowed so richly because He wanted us for His own. We are made to be his

instruments to express the tune on His own heart, to rezoned with the full volume of His will, to vibrate with the warm music of His love. And like any master builder, God placed His stamp on us, even His own image from the beginning and forever we carry upon us the seal of His high intentions for us, and whatever happens to us, there is nothing that can base the fact that we were intended to be His instruments to be played by the master Himself. But what happens to this instruments? That is the tragedy of our life. As with the violins built by a mastercraftsman only a few find the way into the hands of a master player, so with the lives of men. Antonio Stradivari of Cremona, Italy was probably the world's most ingenious violin builder between the years of 1700 and 1737 when he died, he built something like 1,100 violins. Everyone having the true excellence of form and tune, which is the distinction of Stradivari's. Today, such an instrument is an artist's most prized possession. And the few Stradivari's violins that are left are valued anywhere from 15 to \$65,000. When kind of bad wonder what happened to all the others? All the many instruments, which carried the Stradivari's seal, who owns them, how are they being used? What conditions are they in? Is their true potential and their real value acknowledged and recognized? Obviously not even some of know Stradivari's instruments were discovered by sheer accident, but where are the others? In trunks, in the Attics of old mansions in Spain or in the hands of a hillbilly descendant of a proud British nobleman, or maybe on the top shelf of a bookcase in the living room somewhere where nobody knows how to play such a superb instrument, or maybe they are played by men who have no concern for the quality of music that these instruments were intended to play. Maybe they are being grabbed by a man who pervert their tune into the lustful style of the Tavern. Maybe there are the used by men who would not even hope to bring out the potential of a homemade instruments. There is tragedy in such possibilities. And again, you recognize we're speaking in a parable, but the meaning of this parable for our life is clear. It is the tragedy of our life that we fall into the hands of one who has no understanding for the high destiny for which we were made, who has no concern for the superb quality which is there who has no appreciation for the true value of our life. It was upon discovering such a truth that David or whoever wrote Psalm 51 in his name wrote the Psalm expressing the deep prayer of a broken heart. He had fallen and he knew it, deeper than he ever had dreamed of falling, he had gone. Knowing full well what high intentions God had for his life in raising him up from a shepherd boy to become the anointed king of Israel, David yet found himself the victim of the unholy steerings of an undisciplined heart. And then a series of this graceful acts committed both adultery and murder, sins for which the only possible penalty was death. It's in this situation that David breaks down and prays the prayer of a contrite heart. It's a moving prayer expressing both confession and petition and rededication. Listen to the prayer as it falls within these three parts. Here first is the confession. "I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done that which is evil in Thy sight. Thou desires truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart." And that's the transition to his petition. "Have mercy upon me O God according to Thy steadfast love. According to the abundant mercy blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin, purge me and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Fill me with joy and gladness. Let the bones, which Thou hast broken rejoice, hide Thy face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God and put a new and right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation. Uphold me with a willing spirit." And then as transition to the rededication, the phrase, which has been repeated throughout the centuries. "O, Lord open now my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy price. Deliver me from death, O God, Thou God of my salvation. And my tongue will sing aloud of Thy deliverance. Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways and sinners will return to Thee. Open Thou my lips

and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise. Deliver me and my tongue shall sing aloud. This is the prayer of a heart who knows that God's intention was that he should glorify God and then joy Him forever. But they also show that he who praises aware of the fact that his life is not what it was intended to be, open my lips, he says, deliver me. I'm really Thine instrument, but I have fallen out of the master's hand. There's another, who is playing on this instrument and he is playing strange and unholy music. Bring me back where I belong, let my life resound with the joy of Thy will, the gladness of Thy grace." Such is the prayer of a heart returning to God, such is the prayer of all sinners. Those who have fallen helplessly into the hands of an evil artist who only distorts the human instrument to earn holy purposes, but not all of us fall in this obvious and dramatic way. Not all of us are sinners of the same caliber. Some of us might not even be aware of any direct and conscious complicity to God in our heart. When preachers fonder over the evils of the human heart, we have difficulty applying this to ourselves. We're not really opposed to God's will, we rather puzzle as to what this will is and how we limited as we are can find it. We're not really as proud and presumptuous as we are made out to be, we are rather in search for something, someone who can fill the empty spaces of our crossword puzzle and give it meaning both horizontally and vertically. And the symbolism of our parables, it isn't that our lives instrument is being grabbed by the evil one and perverted to fit the style of the lustful tavern. For some of us and I dare say many of us it is rather a situation of finding ourselves with out a master unfulfilled, with tunes in our lives that could be played with potentials, which could be released, with usefulness which goes to waste, with praise, which is never expressed as the instrument on the top shelf of a bookstand in my home never realized, never fulfilled, never coming in to its own. We have the quality of music in us, but we have never been in the hands of the proper master. We have the seal of the master builder upon us, but we have never become what the master's intention was. There is more than, than drastic sin, which can destroy our life as instruments of God. There is an old saying in the East, which goes like this, "Do not let rats know the strings off of your instruments." Maybe that's what's happening to us. There is no music in our lives, no fulfillment of our praise to God, no release of our full spiritual potentialities because we have allowed the rats of modern living to know the strings off of our instruments. And God knows there are numerous rats. For fear of allegorizing, I'm not going to name them, but have you thought of what the pressures of modern life does to our understanding of God and our understanding of ourselves. There's the popular intellectualism, which cannot and will not comprehend anything which supersedes the multiplication table. To these intellectuals, there's no religious dimension, no dimension of meaning beyond the obvious. There's the so-called scientific worldview, which considers it merely a matter of time until the secrets of the universe have been uncovered. They recite their creed energy equals mass times velocity squared and feel cold in their souls. There's the widespread materialism in whose view all aspects of life even God, even faith are to be forced into orbit around ourselves, to contribute to our material and psychological wellbeing. There is no God to worship and fall down before in such a view of life. And there is the steadily expanding secularism, which divides man's life up into compartments considering one part, the religious one, one seventh of the week, and the other parts as belonging to us to do with as we want. And add to these modern, more is the pressures of economy, the burdens of family, the worries over health, the anxieties for our future, the loneliness of sorrow, the temptations of youth, the trials of manhood, the fears of old age. It is really a wonder that anyone can sing under such circumstances. In this situation is it not fitting that we also should make David's words our own. "Fill me with joy and gladness. Let the bones, which Thou has broken rejoice. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. O Lord open now my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise. Deliver me O God, Thou God of my salvation

and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy deliverance." We have spoken a parable the parable of an instrument. For our life is much like that made by the master, intended for the master's hand. But at times, we find ourselves in the hands of another, or we find ourselves silent because our strings are broken. This is the tragedy of our life. But here, the parable breaks down the tragedy is not final. What in the world's perspective is a tragedy, it's in the perspective of faith, God's possibility in relation to God we are not as a dead piece of wood and as an idol or broken string, it is not entirely beyond our power, who it is, who will play our instrument and the quality of the music that is to be played. It belongs to the divine scheme for our life that we shall ourselves decide who it is that shall be our master. God's plan and intention is clear. He made us for Himself to be His instruments, to express the tune of His heart, to resound with the full volume of His will, to vibrate with the warm music of His love, but if this is not our experience, the tragedy can be the possibility in the life of the believer for we can choose to return to God, to place our life back into the hands from which we sprang, to make it our lives melody, our chief end to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. There's no necessity then for an instrument to be found misused in the hands of an evil artist. There's no necessity that we should lie unused with broken strings in want of a master to release our potential and give meaning to our life. The great master whose instruments we are is waiting to play His tune And now let us pray, O God from whose hands we spring and whose image we bear, bring us now, even in this moment, back into the fulfillment of Thy intentions for us, and thus let our lives find its meaning in Thee. And now unto Him, that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our savior be glory and majesty, dominion, and power both now and evermore. ♪ Honor ♪