

dcrmv001345001.mkv / Elizabeth Achtemeier - "What We Were Meant to Be" Extended Version - includes Raleigh Boys Choir ... / Duke Digital Repository

(choir singing in foreign language) (gentle organ music) (choir singing in foreign language) (choir singing in foreign language) (choir singing in foreign language) (choir singing in foreign language) (gentle organ music)

- Would you please stand for the greeting. Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Congregation: And renew a right spirit within me.

- Open my lips, O Lord.

Congregation: And my mouth shall proclaim your praise. (gentle organ music) (organ drowning out singing)

- You may be seated. Would you please join me in the Prayer for Illumination.

All: Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we may hear your message to us this Lenten season. Amen.

- The Old Testament lesson comes from the Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, beginning with the first verse. Then God spoke all these words. "I am the Lord your God, "who brought you out to the land of Egypt, "out to the house of slavery. "You should have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, "whether in the form of anything "that is in Heaven above or that is on the Earth beneath, "or that is in the water under the Earth. "You shall not bow down to them, "or worship them. "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, "punishing children for the iniquity of parents, "to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me. "But showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation, "of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not make wrongful use of "the name of the Lord your God, "for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, "six days you shall labor and do all your work, "but the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God. "You shall not do any work. "You, your son, or your daughter, "your male or female slave, "your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. "For, in six days, the Lord made Heaven and Earth, "the sea and all that is in them, "but rested the seventh day. "Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day "and consecrated it. "Honor your father and your mother, "so that your days may be long "in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, "or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, "or anything that belongs to your neighbor." This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

- Please stand for the Response of Reading of the Psalm. The Heavens are telling the glory of God, and the

firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

Congregation: Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge.

- There is no speech, nor are there words. Their voice is not heard.

Congregation: Their voice goes out through all the Earth, and their words to the end of the world.

- In them, God has set a tent for the sun, which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and runs its course with joy, like a strong man.

Congregation: Its rising is from the end of the Heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

- The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

Congregation: The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

- The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

Congregation: The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

- The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

Congregation: The rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

- More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold.

Congregation: Sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

- Moreover, by them is your servant warned. In keeping them, there is great reward.

Congregation: Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

- Also, keep your servant from the insolent. Let them not have dominion over me.

Congregation: Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

All: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer. (gentle organ music) (organ drowning out singing)

- The gospel lesson comes from the Book of John, the second chapter, beginning with the 13th verse. The

Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, in the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changes seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured-out the coins of the money changers, and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here. "Stop making my father's house a marketplace." His disciples remembered that it was written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" And Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for 46 years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture, and the word that Jesus had spoken. This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God. (gentle organ music) (choral singing in foreign language) (choral singing in foreign language)

- Before I read the New Testament lesson from the Epistle to the Corinthians, just let me say it is always a pleasure and an honor for me to worship with you at Duke. Our Epistle lesson is taken from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, the first chapter, beginning at the 18th verse. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us, who are being saved, it is the power of God. For is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, "and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart. "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? "Where is the debater of this age? "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? "For since in the wisdom of God, "the world did not know God through wisdom, "it pleased God through the folly of what we preach, "to save those who believe. "For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom. "But we preach Christ crucified, "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to gentiles. "But to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, "Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, "and the weakness of God is stronger than men." This is the word of the Lord. (mumbling Congregation response) When it comes to religion, times don't change very much. The Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian church stated that when he preached among them, he had only one message. Jesus Christ and him crucified. And, of course, still today, that cross is at the center of our faith. The prominent, never-changing, universal symbol of the one Lord in whom we believe. But, says Paul, in our epistle lesson, that cross was regarded by his pagan world as a symbol of folly; as a stumbling block to the Jews, who could not believe that a true messiah would be crucified; and as foolishness to the Greeks. And maybe that is still the case in our Greek-like world. The cross still seems utterly foolish at the end of this 20th Century, a symbol to be eliminated from every public building; a fact never to be mentioned in a university classroom; a strange sign, never to be taken seriously, by those who run the print and broadcast media. It seems to be the case, these days, that every form of religion can find a ready hearing in our education institutions, except the traditional Christian faith. We will listen to every opinion about the animism of North American Indians, or about new age Monism, or about far eastern mysticism, indeed sometimes we will even use their liturgies. But mention Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and the audience shrinks to a faithful few. As for the media, well, they have decided to lump every Christian believer into a political group called The Religious Right. Oh, to be sure, the media-folk know that every politician should claim to be religious at election time. But then, they insist, the politician's religious faith must not have anything to do with decision-making in the government. Anyone who believe the scriptures is automatically named a fundamentalist, and is therefore

thought to be dangerous. "And all such persons," wrote The Washington Post, "are largely uneducated, poor, and easy to command." Yes, the Christian faith is foolishness to our society, and the cross of Christ is folly. Judging by the way we think and act, I wonder if Christ's cross is not also foolishness to many of us here this morning. Foolishness, at least a lot of the time. For, the message of the cross, you see, is that you and I have something wrong with us, and that is not an announcement that we like to hear, not in this day and age. Ours, is a time of individual worth and autonomy, and self direction, is it not? A time when the individual's experience reigns supreme over all other authority. Said a speaker on this campus not too long ago, "Women do not need to be redeemed, "they just need to be affirmed." And that is what we all think we need, is it not? The affirmation that we are responsible, strong, self-governing individuals, who can make their own decisions about what is right and what is wrong, who can eliminate sexism, racism, militarism, all those -isms that have so undermined community. And yes, who have the ability to remake this world into the harmonious place that it was meant to be. And how do we self-governing individuals plan to do that? Well, so many of us think we can remake the world by fixing the system. That is, by restructuring the powers and institutions that constitute our society. It's the system that's out of joint these days, we think, and it has victimized us all. So, we will organize ourselves, and form a caucus, and exercise our rights. And by protests, and consciousness-raising, through courts, and media, and propaganda, we will gain enough power to put our own particular program into effect. And then, by Heaven, we will be able to right some wrongs in this society. Power. That's what we need to heal our world, in our estimation. And so, as Malcolm Muggeridge has written, "The dogma that our human condition "can be ameliorated by the exercise of power "has come to be almost universally accepted. "For then, you see, we can change the system, "and none of us will have to be good." Well, certainly, if that is the agenda we live by these days, it is no wonder that we reject the cross of Christ. For, that man hanging on the cross, is one totally without power. What should we call him, the Ultimate Victim, since this is an age of victims? The One Sacrificed to an Evil System? Bleeding, thirsting, dying, with no one to demand his rights for him, and no one picketing in protest of his execution. We live in an age of power play, friends, and the cross does not qualify. It's occupant is too lonely, too desolate, too impotent there on cavalries hill. He urged us once to take up our cross and be crucified with him, but that is not the way we secure our lives in a world such as ours. Or is it? Could it be that the truth is, as Paul says in our scripture lesson, that the foolishness of the cross is wiser than the wisdom of us mortals, and that the weakness of the cross is stronger than the power we seek for ourselves. For, clearly, the cross tells us that there is something wrong with us, and it does that by showing us what is right, and what we ought to be. You see, that dying man on the cross bears the image of God. To be sure, he is also the Son of God, incarnate. But in his human nature too, he bears the image of God. And amazingly enough, the scriptures tell us, so do you and I. We are made in the image of God, made like the image of Christ. Made to live in relationship with our Heavenly Father, and to glorify him, and to enjoy him forever. And the one thing that distinguishes Christ's human nature from ours, is that he will not give up that relationship. He will not deny his tie to his father, he will not go it on his own. Tempted in every way, as we are, he will not turn his back on God. Even when the mob comes out to arrest him, and Judas betrays him with a kiss. Even when Pilate tempts him with the possibility of avoiding a torturous death, even when the nails tear at his flesh and he thinks God himself has forsaken him to die alone. Jesus will not claim to be free of his Heavenly Father. No, he believes that God owns his life, and is working in him to accomplish his good purpose. He believes that the cross is to be accepted as the wisdom of God, and he believes that by that cross, God will exercise his power. And so, as Paul puts it, Jesus Christ empties himself of every glory and desire and goal of his own,

and humbles himself, and becomes obedient, even to death. And that obedience, friends, shows us what is wrong with us. For here we are, aren't we? All of us, autonomous, independent, self-governing individuals, trying to live life on our own without God. So often breaking those commandments, that we heard for our Old Testament lesson, so often denying by our words and actions that we have any connection with God whatsoever. So often refusing to bear the image of God in Christ that we were meant to be. What shall we call ourselves? Runaway children? Like those thousands of homeless kids on our city streets? Oh, sure, we use the hotline once in a while to call home to make sure that the father is still there, but we do not return home, because we want to go it on our own. And so, shall we say that the Whiffenpoof song sums up what our destiny shall be? Songsters off on a spree, damned from here to eternity? Friends, apart from God, we do not even know who we are. Do you think that your human personality can be adequately described, except in relation to your maker? Can the psychologist, the sociologist, the economist, the humanist, accurately reveal your nature? No! Not if they leave out the fact that you were made to bear within you an image that points to a transcended glory. And so, apart from our relation to God, we are, indeed, damned to eternity; lost and forsaken. As Christopher Morley put it, "Comic and struggling human beings, "destined for agony and disappointment, "and bawdy stories." Or as Rosemary Ruether would have us believe, "Just dying dust. "Decayed compost to fertilize the gardens "of the next generation." But let's forget the figures of speech, let's put it in the traditional language of the Christian church, that language that seems so silly to our faithless age. We are sinners, friends. Sinners, because we have denied our relationship with God. Sinners, because we have refused to be what we were created to be: God's image, his obedient creatures who reflect his life, revealed to us in his son. That life of faithfulness, of sole concern for the father's will, that life that forgets itself and lives only to God. And because that is true, friends, because we want to be independent of our maker, you, and I, and every faithless soul like us, are just going to die. Die, eternally, far from home, like runaway kids whose spree has ended. There is no life apart from the God of Jesus Christ. He is the sole creator and owner of all life in this universe, and apart from him there are only death, void, the door closed forever. And yes, compost for the next generation. But the cross, good Christians, is the wisdom and power of God, and yes, it is also his love. And so God will not deny his relationship with us, though daily we try to deny ours with him. Indeed, in forgiveness, he sends his son to seek us out, to find all us runaway children, to take our flesh, to know our loneliness, to suffer our defeats and struggles, to be tempted in every respect as we are yet without sinning. And, yes, to descend into our death and to know the extinction of the grave. To find us, Christ had to come where we are, and he had to deal with the realities of our existence, because God, in his wisdom, knew that was the only way he could save us. And so Jesus Christ took on our sin and by his obedience, even unto death on Golgotha, he broke the power of sin! And the son of God suffered our death, and was raised in triumph over it. Now, that may sound like foolishness to a self-serving society, but to those of us who are being saved, it is the wisdom of God, and the power of God. And so, this morning, you see, we are invited to participate in the benefits of that wisdom and power. We are invited to become, once more, what we were meant to be, persons made in the image of God, who were created to live eternally in the company of our Heavenly father. But our Lord has told us what we must do to accept that invitation. "Take up your cross and follow me," he said. In other words, let your self will, your autonomy, your desire to run your own life, let all of that be crucified and done away forever. Die, to yourself, as Christ died to himself on the cross. Trust your life, and future, and welfare to God, as Christ trusted them there on Golgotha. And then cling to God, good Christians. Hold fast to your relationship with him, through prayer, through scripture study, through worship, through obedience, and every daily round

and decision, refuse ever to give up your God, for God in Christ does not want to give up you. In his power and his wisdom, by the cross and resurrection, he wants you to have eternal life with him. Yes, he wants you to be what you were created to be. Amen. (gentle organ music) (organ drowning out singing)

- [Brown Haired Female Minister] Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

- Let us pray. With all our hearts, and with all our minds, let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer." For the faithful witness of the church, that it may proclaim Christ crucified to a world that follows the folly of it's own devices, and that often times seeks to silence the good news of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ...hear our prayer.

- For the unity of the Church throughout the world, for the fellowship of Christians across lines of race, ethnicity, and nation. That separating divisions and prejudices may decrease, and that the spirit of peace may establish waring neighbors in the bonds of unity and love. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ...hear our prayer.

- For those who do not yet believe. For those drawing near the light of faith. And for those whose faith has dimmed. That they may come to the knowledge of your truth. Lord, in your mercy...

Congregation: ...hear our prayer.

- For the leaders of this land, and of all the nations, that they may govern with wisdom, that they may seek the common good, rather than the welfare of the few, and that they may encourage peace a justice among all peoples. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ... hear our prayer.

- For the earth, that we may respect it as part of your creation, and be fitting stewards of its many resources. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ... hear our prayer.

- For those of the Duke community, who this we give of themselves in ministry and mission. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ... hear our prayer.

- For those who are poor and oppressed. For those unemployed and homeless. For prisoners, and captives, and for all who remember and care for them, that they may find courage and comfort in your steadfast love. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ... hear our prayer.

- For those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, especially our brothers and sisters in Duke Hospital, that they may find comfort, courage, and hope, and be delivered from their distress. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ... hear our prayer.

- For all who have died in the communion of your church, and for those whose faith is known to you alone, we give you thanks. May we be faithful like those who have gone before us, and bring us at last to the joy of your heavenly kingdom. Lord, in your mercy...

All: ... hear our prayer.

- Eternal God, accept these prayers of your people, and strengthen us to do your will through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. With gladness, let us present our offerings of life and labor to the Lord. (gentle organ music) (choir singing in foreign language) (gentle organ music) (organ drowning out singing)

- Let us pray. All things come from you, O God. You created all that is. With the care of a skillful potter, you lovingly formed us from the dust of the earth, into your image. You set us apart for faithful obedience, and gave us your law. Yet, when we disobeyed and turned from you, your love never failed. You gave us judges and prophets to show us the true way, and as the ultimate act of love, you gave your only son, Jesus Christ, to be our savior, that we might be remade into your likeness, and have abundant and eternal life. All that we are, and all that we have, is a trust from you. And so, with grateful hearts, we return to you what is yours. We offer ourselves and all that we have in praise and thanksgiving, in union with Christ's offering for us. By your Holy Spirit, make us one in Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying,

All: "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 trespassed against us. "And lead us not into temptation, "but deliver us from evil, "for thine is the kingdom, the power, "and the glory forever."

- Amen. (gentle organ music) (organ drowning out singing)

- Go forth in peace. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now, and forevermore. Amen. (gentle organ music)