

- Worship with a greeting. Please stand as we join together. Hear the choices God sets before us, life and prosperity, or death and adversity. (congregation speaking) Listen to the ordinances of our God, love God and walk in the way God commands. (congregation speaking) Happy are those who delight in God's law. Blessed are all who meditate on God's word. (congregation speaking) (organ music) (congregation singing) (uplifting organ music) (choir singing) Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, you are always more ready to bestow your good gifts, than we are to seek them. You're always more willing to give, than we desire or deserve. Help us so to seek that we may truly find, so to ask, that we may joyfully receive. So to knock that the door of your mercy may be open to us. Through Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray the prayer for Illumination.

Congregation: Open our hearts and minds oh God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that as the Lord is readily proclaimed, we may hear your message with joy this day, Amen.

- The Old Testament reading is from the book of Jeremiah. Chapter 18, verses 1-11. "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. "Come, go down to the potter's house "and there I will let you hear my words. "So I went down to the potter's house "and there he was working at his wheel. "The vessel he was making of clay "was spoiled in the potter's hand. "And he reworked it into another vessel, "as seemed good to him. "Then the word of the Lord came to me. "Can I not do with you, oh house of Israel? "Just as this potter has done, says the Lord. "Just like the clay in the potter's hand, "so are you in my hand, oh house of Israel. "At one moment, I may declare concerning a nation, "or a kingdom, that I will pluck up "and break down and destroy it. "But if this nation concerning which I have spoken, "turns from its evil, I will change my mind "about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. "And at another moment, I may declare "concerning a nation, or a kingdom, "that I will build and plant it. "But if it does evil in my sight, "not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind, "about the good that I had intended to do to it. "Now therefore, say to the people of Judah, "and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "thus says the Lord, "Look, I am a potter "shaping all evil against you "and devising a plan against you. "Turn now, all of you, from your evil way. "And amend your ways and your doings." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- The Psalm appointed for this morning, is Psalm 139, found on page 854 of your hymnal. We will sing verses 1-6. Please rise and sing the Psalm on the Glory irresponsively. (organ music) ♪ Oh Lord you have searched me ♪ ♪ And known me ♪ (choir singing) ♪ You search on my path and my lying down ♪ ♪ And you're acquainted with all my ways ♪ (choir singing) ♪ You pursue me behind and before ♪ ♪ And lay your hand upon me ♪ (choir singing) ♪ Oh glory be to you, Creator ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ our Savior ♪ (choir singing) ♪ As it was a time began ♪ (choir singing) You may be seated.

- The New Testament lesson is from Paul's letter to Philemon. Chapter 1, verses 8-21. "For this reason, though I am bold enough "in Christ to command you to do your duty, "yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love. "And I Paul, do this as an old man. "And now also, as a prisoner of Christ, Jesus. "I'm appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, "who's father I have become, during my imprisonment. "Formerly, he was useless to you. "But now he is indeed useful to both you and me. "I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. "I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might "be of service to me, in your place, "during my imprisonment, for the Gospel. "But I prefer to do nothing without your consent, "in order that your good deed, might be voluntary "and not something forced. "Perhaps this is the reason "he was separated from you for awhile. "So that you might have him back forever. "No longer as a slave, but much more than a slave. "A beloved brother, especially to me. "But how much more to you, both in the flesh "and in the Lord? "So if you consider me your partner, "welcome him as you would welcome me. "If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, "charge that to my account. "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. "I will repay it. "I say nothing about you owing me, even your own self. "Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you, "in the Lord. "Refresh my heart in Christ. "Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you "knowing that you will do even more than I say." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God. (choir singing)

- The Gospel lesson is from the book of Luke. Chapter 14, verses 25-33. "Now large crowds were traveling with him "and he turned and said to them, "whoever comes to me, and does not hate "father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters "yes and even life itself, "cannot be my disciple. "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me, "cannot be my disciple. "For which of you intending to build a tower, "does not first sit down and estimate the cost, "to see whether he has enough to complete it. "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, "and is not able to finish, all who see it, "will begin to ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." "Or what king going out to wage war, against another king, "will not sit down first and consider "whether he is able with 10,000, to oppose the one "who comes against him, with 20,000. "If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, "he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple, "if you do not give up all of your possessions."

- Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer, Amen. Several years ago, Ross Laboratories of Columbus, Ohio, held a conference. It was entitled, "Ethical Dilemmas "in Current Obstetric and Newborn Care." One of the participants in that conference, was an economist. His name is Richard Hartwick. He talked about the economic impact of modern medicine's capacity to preserve the lives of infants, who under different circumstances, would die. This is what he said. "It is obvious from the data presented "at this conference, that the expenditures "of large sums of money, for intensive care, "could save the lives of many infants, "who would ordinarily die without such care. "However, some of these infants will be "mentally and/or physically handicapped. "The care which a society must then provide "for those that are handicapped, "forces substantial costs on that society. "Over and above the costs for intensive care. "These additional costs, may exceed the benefits "of saving the infants' lives, in the first place." Then Hartwick went on to say this. "While some may find the economist's viewpoint repelling, "it's virtue, stems from the fact "that it

recognizes that none of other disciplines "seems to recognize, everything has its price." Now in our own great medical center, here on the Duke campus, ethical decisions involving priority and cost, are being made everyday. Choice and decision are painful, because we cannot have or do everything. This is true of course, for both individuals and for societies. The crisis in healthcare in our society is evidence of this, as are the endless debates in Congress about competing claims. In the course of the past year, Duke University Medical Center has had to undertake major readjustments of personnel and procedures, to cope with the reality that there are limits to what we can do. If you saw the front page of this morning's paper, you might have noticed two articles about this very matter. In one, it talked about possible increased coordination of the services of Duke Hospital and the Durham Regional Hospital. The story says that what people want is "quality care at low cost," and that's an exact quote. The larger article, was about the Republican proposals in Congress to cut Medicare. Higher education is dealing with these realities. In the face of federal cutbacks in research funding. Even at Duke University, we cannot do everything. Limited resources make hard choices necessary. So the economist says, "Everything has its price." But I want to dispute Hartwick's claim that it is only economics that teaches us this lesson. The Bible and Christian faith recognize that everything has its price, long before anyone in the world had even heard of the modern discipline now called economics. Christians have always known that choices are necessary and priorities must be set. You can't read the New Testament without recognizing that Jesus continually emphasized the inevitability of hard choices. Hard choices require the careful establishment of cost. Everything has its price. In our Gospel lesson read so well by Jennifer this morning, we find Jesus surrounded by a crowd of people. Now these crowds thought that he was going to be an earthly messiah. They expected him to become a king and they wanted to be on the right side. Jesus tried to set them straight and to indicate that being a disciple would be difficult. It would not be all glory in the company of an earthly ruler. It would involve hard choices and high cost. "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, "wife and children, brothers and sister, "yes and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." Now Jesus does not literally mean that one must hate ones family. Matthew in his Gospel, uses the language of comparison, saying that, "One must not love family more than Jesus." The point is, that to be a disciple of Jesus, is to put the love of God ahead of all else. Discipleship involves setting priorities. For the Christian, there is only one priority and that is obedience to God in Jesus Christ. Jesus further says, "Whoever does not carry the cross "and follow me, cannot be my disciple. "For which of you intending to build a tower "does not first sit down and estimate the cost, "to see whether he has enough to complete it." Everything has its price. The cost of discipleship is high. The cost is nothing less than placing the love of God in Christ Jesus first in our lives. All of us, I think, have known people who have set out to build a house, or something else and then part way through, discovered that they couldn't go on. In the town I grew up in, we had one famous example of this. A house that was about half complete and we used to joke about this fellow who had started out and then failed to complete it, because he hadn't counted the cost. Only a fool would do that. In life and certainly in Christian faith, we must set priorities and count cost. To make this point most dramatically, Jesus ends this lesson, by a startling statement. He says, "So therefore, none of you "can become my disciple, if you do not give up "all your possessions." Now this is no easy teaching. No hard nosed economist, can be tougher than this. Jesus set the terms and conditions in stark reality. There is a high cost, to discipleship. Now there are several great questions that we could explore this morning and I want to mention a few of them. One of them is that of identity. Jesus is asking us, I think, to face the question, "Do I really want to be a disciple?" We're forced to admit that if I do, there is a price to be paid. We must ask, "Who am I? "What is the nature of my identity?"

Our self identity determines our ability to deal with priorities, to count costs and make choices. Who will tell you, who you are? Will it be your parents? Your friends? Your professors? This university? Business colleagues? Academic colleagues from elsewhere? Television, movies, the media? We all know people whose ideas and opinions simply reflect those around them. Our culture tries to mold us into an identity to suit its ambitions for economic gain and power. You who are students will encounter all manner of opinion and lifestyle in this university. If you do not have a clear sense of your own identity, you can lose yourself. The answer to the question of identity for the Christian, is that it is God who tells us who we are. We are mortal sinners, who stand in need of God's grace. It is in the church that we discover our authentic identity. Now there are many competing ideas about truth in our world. They all involve cost of one sort or another, never think that there's any easy way. Christian faith however, is vital and compelling because the truth of God in Jesus Christ, frees us for others. The Christian disciple is freed from undue and paralyzing self-concern and freed for self-giving. Christ calls disciples, but there is a cost. The price is the disciplining of our wills. The shaping of our identities. Discipleship is a great adventure. The Scriptures make that clear. It's an adventure that gives life value and meaning and purpose. This great chapel, stands in the center of Duke University. To remind us that from the beginning to end, human life is finally explained, only in God's terms. Let us recognize that it is God who tells us who we are. Our identity comes from God, nowhere else. Now for those of us in this university community, the questions Jesus, the economist, puts before us, force us in turn, to ask a second great question. Why are we here in this university? And what is this education for? Is a Duke education to prepare you for making a living, or for living a life? I hope that it is the latter and I hope that you will remember that you are living a life, even while you are in this university. Duke is an island of pleasure and privilege in a world of deprivation. If we don't see and hear, then we all have failed. In the past year, we at Duke, have spent far too much time worrying about our own living, eating, working and partying arrangements and far too little time, worrying about how this community might help alleviate the extraordinary needs of Durham, of the children of the world, or of those whose lives are characterized by unrelieved poverty. Christian faith compels us to give attention to great ideas and great service. The Gospel disciplines us and makes us set priorities and count costs. Your education, our education, isn't worth anything, if it is isolated from the realities of the world. There are many, many groups of students and faculty within this university, deeply involved in service to our local community and to the larger community. And all of us are called to such service. Our nation is faced today with a growing gap, between an educated, wealthy and powerful elite and an uneducated, poor and dependent group of persons. Perhaps at no time in our nation's history, has this problem been so acute and we don't seem to understand that the price will be very high. This weekend, this Christian coalition so called, has been meeting in Washington. I've listened to some of what they have to say. And they don't seem to understand that this political agenda is in large measure governed by economic interests. Reminded me of Bishop William Lawrence, who was the Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts at the beginning of this century, when it might be argued, we came close to being in this kind of gap situation, that I've been talking about. Bishop Lawrence said this in 1901. "Now we are in a position to affirm "that neither history, experience, nor the Bible, "necessarily sustains the common distrust "of the affect of material wealth on morality. "Godliness," he said, "is in league with riches." Everything has its price. In God's economy, we in universities, corporations and churches, cannot simply serve ourselves, without ultimately paying a high price. Edward Pusey, a 19th century Oxford professor, said, "Acute and subtle intellect, "if undisciplined, are destructive, "both to themselves and to the body politic, "in proportion to their very powers." All that means is, you can

be very smart and also, very bad. A third question, this consideration of the cost of discipleship places before us is, can any of us pay the price? Is it realistic to think that you or I can be a disciple? I mean, this is potent stuff, Jesus is putting before us. Is it realistic to think that you or I can fulfill this expectation? We can I think, come to terms with our identity and I think we can recognize, that who we are is a gift from God. I think we can use our education, our gifts and our abilities for service and we can perhaps, shape our lives for giving, rather than for greed. But Jesus ratchets the price up higher. He says, "None of you can become my disciple, "if you do not give up all your possessions." I think it would be absurd and dishonest of me to suggest in this magnificent chapel this morning, that this is a realistic option. None of us, I think, can give up all our possessions. What then are we to do? Despair, ignore the teaching? Or, like biblical interpreters have done for centuries, look for another passage of Scripture, to balance the demand. In fact, it's at this point that we see that part of what Jesus is trying to teach us, is that even discipleship itself, is a gift from God. By setting the price so impossibly high, Jesus brings us up short, all of us. We can't pay this price. And that is just the point. We need to see that God has already paid the price, for you and for me. Our own efforts, our own intelligence, our own knowledge, our own art, our clever analyses. All of these are ultimately for nothing, apart from God. None of us can do enough to merit salvation. We literally cannot do all that Jesus demands. The cost is too great. I think that is exactly why Jesus demands so much. We are left hopeless, if we rely on ourselves. This is the insight missing from economics. This is the insight missing from politics. This is the insight missing from self help books. What is missing from these options, is God. They all propose that human beings can get things right, if they only will. The startling thing the Christian knows, is that that is simply untrue. It is not true that human beings can get things right. Christian faith recognizes that we will not and we will not because first of all, we are sinners and we are therefore apart from what God intends and apart from God, we can do nothing. On our own, Christian discipleship itself is impossible. The price is too great. We can't pay it. But, there's good news. And that good news is, that discipleship is an impossible possibility, because of God's grace unto us. This morning's Gospel passage, actually is finished by Luke, a couple of chapters later, when Jesus says, "What is impossible for mortals, is possible for God." And that's the good news. If you are daunted by the high demands of Christ, remember that you are not left to fulfill them alone. He who calls you to the steep road, will walk with you, every step of the way and will be there at the end, to meet you. This is the great, good news of the Gospel. What is impossible for mortals, is possible for God. In the end, it is God's grace that will prevail and therefore, we who are human can invest ourselves fully in the needs of the world, without despair and without the frustration that comes from recognizing that the cost is too great and without the arrogance that comes from the assumption that we can control and shape the future of the world. I began by quoting an economist, talking about the issues of cost benefit analysis, of potentially handicapped children. Now I hope you see, that economics is not in fact, so radical in asking us to face hard choices. You want hard choices? Christian faith can give you hard choices. Hard choices are not the problem. The problem, is what we value. In a strict cost accounting analysis, handicapped children might seem too costly. But what I've tried to suggest to you this morning, is this that the Gospel invites us to see a far more radical truth. The values and assumptions that characterize so much of secular human thought and action, are turned upside down in God's economics. Everything has its price, but the terms and conditions are not those of our modern market economy. Ultimately, the terms and conditions are those of God. Handicapped children, persons who do not have our sharp mental abilities. Persons who are weak and powerless. Persons who are poor and without economic power. Persons who give their lives to service. Ironically, it is these, who point the way to God's truth, which is the truth of all

creation. We are called to understand that everything has its price and to ask hard questions. Who am I? Where do I get my identity? What is my education for? In what ways am I called to service in this world, that has such desperate needs? Can I discipline my will with God's help, to set limits on my demands, so that others can participate in this world's goods and services? Do I really know that in the end, only God's truth will prevail? Can I see that God's economics, turns things upside down? Certainly, everything has its price. What we need to be sure of, is that what we choose, is really worth it. Amen. (organ music) (congregation singing)

- You may be seated. The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Oh Lord you have searched us and known us, yet you still call us to be your own. From the beginning of life until now, you have surrounded us with your love and sustained us day by day. You have paid a great price on our behalf. A price that we can never merit or repay. Hear now your people, who come to offer thanksgivings to your holy and wonderful name. Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

- How easily do we come to you for words of comfort and enlightenment? We quickly ask for your healing of our wounds. We accept it when you give us what we want, but we do not take up the fullness of discipleship, when we realize how much it costs. For trying to pick and choose from your bounty, for the selfishness that denies commitment, for our sin of rejecting you, forgive us, good Lord. Shape and form us into the image for which we were made, that we might give you delight. Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

- Teach us to count the cost of following you and so arrange our priorities that we will be able to serve you above all else. Discipline our wills and shape our identities, so that we might rightly choose among the many choices and paths offered to us. Free us, for service to your great purposes. Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

- The Holy Spirit has enabled your people throughout the ages, to share the faith and bring encouragement to those who suffer. Having been made free by your grace, may the same Spirit give us strength to proclaim the good news of salvation and grace to all those who do not yet know you. Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

- You are a God of mercy and compassion and you call us to be a people who use our freedom and power in ways that are merciful and compassionate. Indeed, you've called us to be brother and sister to one another. Show us those in our midst, whom we can help, that they might experience your love through our love.

Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

- For all the freedom which is ours, we know that there are things we cannot change alone. Help us to do our part and yet also trust you to accomplish what we cannot do for us and for others. Receive into your care those whom we name in our hearts. Extend your hand of healing to the sick, your peace to those who are troubled and your strength to those who are weak. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Finally, give us quiet minds and hearts to accept your will and to follow Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. We bring our gifts, because God has enabled our sharing and calls us to reach out with good news for others. Therefore, we offer ourselves, our service and our possessions, in grateful response to God's love, in Jesus Christ. (organ music) (clarinet music) (choir singing) (clarinet music) (choir singing) (organ music) ♪ Praise God from who all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise Him, all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Praise God above ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah, ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, Hallelujah, ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ Oh God, most merciful and gracious. Of whose bounty we have all received. Accept this offering of your people. Remember in your love, those who have brought it and those for whom it is given. So follow it with your blessings, that it may promote peace and goodwill among all peoples and advance the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying, "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. "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) (choir singing) (organ music) Go in peace, to love God and serve your neighbor, in all that you do. May the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you and keep you. (choir singing) (organ music)