

(soft music)

- Good morning and welcome to Duke Chapel on this bright summer Sunday. If you're visiting with us we're delighted to have you. If you're in Durham for any length of time this summer and are a singer we invite you to join our summer choir here. Our choir is being directed by guest director this morning, Ms. Susan Clebanaw and we welcome her. Our guest preacher is a frequent visitor to the pulpit of Duke Chapel, Dr. Clyde Fant who is dean of the chapel at Stetson University. Dr. Fant is always a popular preacher here. He's one of America's great homiletical voices and teacher of preaching and we welcome him back to the chapel. Now let's stand for the greeting. The earth and all that is it belongs to God. So let us rejoice in God and in all of creation. Lift up your heads oh gates. Lift them high oh everlasting doors for the God of glory shall enter and reign over us all. (organ music) (congregation singing) Gracious God we are here this morning because we have been summoned here by you. We are here because we are curious about unseen mysterious matters. We are here out of habit. We are here because having searched in many places for meaning, we know not where else to turn but toward you. Take us as we are, oh God, but do not leave us as we are. Remake us and our reasons for being here. Speak to us, show us your glory, teach us your way in this hour of worship, amen. Be seated.

- Lets us pray together the prayer for illumination. Open our hearts and minds oh God by the power of your holy spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed we may hear your message with joy this day, amen. This reading is taken from the 22nd chapter of the book of Genesis, starting with the first verse. "After these things, God tested Abraham. "He said to him, Abraham "and he said, here I am. "He said, take your son, your only son Issac "whom you love and go to the land of Moriah "and offer him there as a burnt offering "on one of the mountains that I shall show you. "So Abraham rose early in the morning "saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him "and his son, Issac. "He cut the wood for the burnt offering and set out "and went to the place in the distance that God "had shown him. "On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place "far away. "Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with "the donkey, the boy and I will go over there, "we will worship and then we will come back to you. "Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering "and laid it on his son Issac, "and he himself carried the fire and the knife. "So the two of them walked on together. "Issac said to his father, Abraham, father, "and he said, here I am my son. "He said, the fire and the wood are here "but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? "Abraham said, God himself will provide the lamb "for a burnt offering, my son. "So the two of them walked on together. "When they came to the place that God had shown him "Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. "He bound his son Issac and laid him on the altar "on top of the wood. "Then Abraham reached out his hand "and took the knife to kill his son, "but the angel of the Lord called on him from heaven "and said, Abraham, Abraham, "and he said, here I am. "He said, do not lay your hand on the boy "or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God "since you have not withheld your son, "your only son from me. "And Abraham looked and saw a ram caught in a thicket "by its horns. "Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up "as a burnt offering instead of his son. "So Abraham called that place, The Lord Will Provide. "As it is said to this day,

"on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

- This morning's psalter is psalm 13 found on page 746 in the hymnal. Please stand and join me in singing the psalter in Gloria responsively. (soft music) ♪ How long, oh Lord will you forget me forever? ♪ ♪ How long will you hide your face from me? ♪ ♪ How long must I bare pain in my soul ♪ ♪ And have sorrow in my heart all the day? ♪ ♪ How long will my enemy triumph over me? ♪ ♪ Consider and answer me oh Lord my God ♪ ♪ Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death ♪ ♪ Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him ♪ ♪ And my foes will rejoice when I fall ♪ ♪ But I trusted in your steadfast love ♪ ♪ My heart rejoices in your salvation ♪ ♪ I will sing to the Lord ♪ ♪ For he has been good to me ♪ ♪ Oh glory be to you creator and to Jesus Christ ♪ ♪ Our savior ♪ (congregation sings) ♪ As it was ere time began ♪ (congregation sings) You may be seated. (soft music) (choir singing)

- This reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Mark. Chapter 10 beginning with the 13th verse. "People were bringing little children to him "in order that he might touch them. "and the disciples spoke sternly to them "but when Jesus saw this he was indignant "and said to them, let the little children come to me. "Do not stop them, for it is to such as these "that the kingdom of God belongs. "Truly I tell you whoever does not receive "the kingdom of God as a little child "will never enter it. "And he took them up in his arms "laid his hands on them and blessed them." This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

- You know, one of the interesting things about college is that you never know who you're in school with. When I was in school one of my good friends was Tom Gerald who is now with ABC News. Tom was the most handsome boy in my high school class. He's gotten a little long in the tooth now as we all have but so it is. I was also in school with Bennett Johnston who is now the U.S. senator from Louisiana. In graduate school I was in school with Bill Moyers. We studied for our doctoral exams together, although since I got my doctorate and he didn't go on to take his I'm clearly the more accomplished of the two. But the guy who really made it big is someone that some of you will not have heard of. Others will have read his offerings. Bob Fulghum, Robert Fulghum who wrote that epic tome, Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, which will come as a tremendous shock to the trustees of Duke University. Not to mention the faculty. That book actually, what it was originally was a pastor's column. Bob was a part time minister in the Unitarian Church in the state of Washington, and he put together a collection of his little pastor's columns and published them under the title of that particular one and that thing now has been translated into every language I think except Bantu. Everyone all over the world has read it. It was followed by the undying classic, It Was Already on Fire When I Lay Down On It which was a line said by a man whose mattress was on fire when the fire department came and they asked him how his mattress caught on fire and he said, I don't know, it was on fire when I lay down on it. I've looked back over my pastor's columns. I don't think they're going to be translated into English, much less any other language. Now, recently to the American Booksellers hosted Bob down at South Beach in Miami. Wining and dining and interviewing him and they took him into a restaurant there to interview him. The place had changed hands since they made the arraignments and with all the cameras rolling, Bob sat to be interviewed in this very funky restaurant under enormous paintings of human body parts that Monty Python always described as naughty bits. Now I don't know what kind of kindergarten Bob went to but I didn't learn that in kindergarten. In one of the recent editions of his book he asked himself rather seriously, I think perhaps too seriously, if that is really true. If it

is really true that everything one needs to know one learns in kindergarten. And as he reflects on it he says, well those basic principles, share, don't hit other people and so forth may sound like pop psychology or just a little superficial but underneath they represent the collected wisdom of the ages and therefore it is actually true that everything we need to know we learned in kindergarten. Let me suggest this morning, everything I need to forget I learned in kindergarten. Now Bob is not entirely serious I suspect in spite of his solemnity for the American Booksellers and I'm not 100% serious either that everything you learn in kindergarten isn't worth remembering. But Bob has a point to make and I have a point to make and the Gospel has a point to make and I think the Gospel's point is better taken. What is the enormous appeal of this little book and this one essay to put that thing on the bestseller list for months and months and months? I don't think it really has to do with the simple homely truths of kindergarten themselves at all. I think the reason that book was so enormously popular is because there is today as there usually is a tremendous desire in society for bottom line thinking. We want the answers. Or better said, we want to know we already have the answers. We want to know that what we think is right. We want the warm, fuzzy reassurance of the binkie beside us all of our lives like the blanket we lay down on in kindergarten. We want to know that what mama and grandmama taught and what we taught our kids is it, period because I said so, and we want to be done with it and then move on to whatever it is we really wanna get after in life. The problem is it just hasn't been my experience that all those things we learn the first time around are the bottom line. For example in kindergarten we learn that one plus one equals two. I mean that's simple enough and certainly can't be challenged, not much it can't be. Morris Kline, professor emeritus of New York University's Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences writing in his book, *Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty* writes that the search for the foundational theory for mathematics is never ending. It's divided between logicians, formalists, set theorists and most of all intuitionists. For example, one plus one equals two in kindergarten. That's the easy part. The hard part is getting to one. And so constantly in the universe all of those things that are taken as bedrock kindergarten, everybody knows it, conventional wisdom truths are being plowed up. If IBM thinks everything it needs to know it learned in Kindergarten it's going to have problems or is that redundant? Apple Computer can't think that way. You can't think that way in your business, but that's part of the reason we wanna think that way about life in general. Because business is such a hassle we want to retreat into the monasticism of a kind of religion that doesn't know or see anything different in life and all the principles of life that we have once heard are in place and intact. I remember when I was studying geometry. I only studied it once, thank goodness and managed to get through it. Have no intention of dealing with any of that again like most of us, but I remember when I was taught that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. I kept thinking there must be an exception to that somewhere. And I remember saying that to my teacher who just laughed and said, maybe but you're not likely going to be the one to figure it out. Well that's no fair. She had been grading my papers. Well, it so happens on a curved earth a straight line just doesn't happen to be the shortest distance between two points, except in abstract theory. If you think a straight line is always the shortest distance between two points, try that next time when you take off from New York to fly to Frankfurt but you better take a lot of oxygen along with you. Over and over again we learn that what seems to be absolute simplicity is either duplicity or foolishness. But we like to reduce things to manageable categories and so we keep coming back to these kindergarten truths that seem to be absolutely secure. Now, some would argue, of course, that this is all ridiculous because Bob Fulghum isn't talking about quantum mechanics, and he isn't talking about the curved space time theories. He's just talking about principles, you know? And principles are absolute. If we

just happened to know what they are. But, on the other hand, when Genghis Khan was in kindergarten they taught him that rape and pillage were okay against your enemies. That was a principle that he learned. When Adolf Hitler was in kindergarten he learned that the Jews were responsible for all the economic woes in Europe. That was a principle that he learned in kindergarten. Some of us in kindergarten learned that blacks stayed in one place and drank from one end of the water fountain and whites drank from the other and rode in the back of the bus. The whole time I was growing up, though it was sort of strange to go to Sunday School and sing, red and yellow, black and white they are precious in his sight. As long as they weren't in our Sunday School classroom. When Jesus was in kindergarten he learned an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The problem with kindergarten absoluteness is that generally speaking what we learned in kindergarten is conventional wisdom. It is a cultured truth. And to whatever degree it is true it is always time bound and limited and gives us a great many problems when we try to apply it out into life. Now, we might not be surprised when a rather insulated white American, which most of us come under that category, comes up with a conclusion that everything we were taught is what's right and then says that the whole world ought to think the same. On the other hand when Jesus comes up with something that sounds remotely kin to that it's a little disturbing. I'm not bothered if Bob Fulghum thinks everything he learned is all he needs to know from kindergarten. But if Jesus thinks that I've got a problem. What does Jesus mean when he says, unless we become as little children we will never see the kingdom of God. First of all you can forget any romanticized Peter Pan notion about children and kindergarten. They certainly didn't have that in first century Palestine. Nobody looked at children that way. Nobody looked at the world that way, least of all a realist like Jesus. The disciples had to be shocked. I mean, all these little kids coming around the feet of Jesus constantly? They were saying, go 'way kid, you bother me. Get out of here. We're having a hard enough time getting this movement taken seriously anyhow. I mean we got women hanging around with us anyhow and the master won't run them off, and I mean we all know, we were taught in kindergarten no women follow rabbis. Everything I need to know I learned in kindergarten, and as for you kids bug off. Kids don't hang around serious teachers either. And Jesus stooped down and put his arms around the children and looked up at the disciples and said, let me tell you guys something. Unless you become like these kids you're never gonna see the kingdom of God. Now that had to snap their head back like a strong dose of ammonia. What is this, they said, this kid thing? Obviously Jesus was saying to them, you need the kind of trust these children have. You need the kind of openness to new things these children have. They haven't been to kindergarten yet. They haven't been acculturated yet. They don't yet know what every Palestinian Israelite knows. They don't know that yet. They don't even know what every good Jew knows yet. They are still open to the truth of God. Unless you become like that you're not gonna see the kingdom of God. You're gonna keep seeing your own kingdoms. Or somebody else's kingdoms. Somebody else's idea of God, but you're not gonna see God. Don't you understand that? And they said, no we don't understand that. He said, you need to go back to the birth canal. That's what the new birthing is all about. It's been so battered around in the media and also by many Christians as well. The new birthing is to go back before kindergarten and before you know what you're supposed to know and start all over again. It's like getting born again. Trouble about a lot of the born again movement is the born again movement itself now starts knowing everything it needs to know so you never get born again in the first place. You get kindergardened again. When I first heard this text I heard it as an altogether religious text and as such altogether untrue. That is I heard it filtered through all of the culture of religion so that I just thought what it meant to be a Christian is I heard this thing, you know, of course Jesus wasn't thinking about being a Christian Jesus was thinking

about seeing God but as I thought of it, in order to get to be a Christian then what I needed to do was to become a child again which meant that all my questions, even at age 13 about God I had to get rid of. What I needed to do was to give up learning modern science, dinosaurs, philosophy, psychology, none of which of course I knew a thing about at 13. You have to remember I was born before kindergartens. Also before groups, you know and so forth. Tori Spelling and education. I thought what they were saying is, unless you believe the otherwise unbelievable and swallow the otherwise unswallowable you will never see the kingdom of God so I tried to become gullible. I seriously prayed to God to make me gullible. I asked God to make me gullible. I couldn't believe in God, I couldn't see God. I didn't know anybody that could and I didn't ever get any sensible answers from anybody about that and I didn't know what to make of that but I certainly didn't want to go to the Baptist hell. I mean there's some bad places to go to you think the Methodist hell is bad, you ain't seen nothing yet. And I prayed that God would make me gullible so I could believe in the otherwise unbelievable and swallow the otherwise unswallowable or else I knew I would never catch a glimpse of God. So as a 13 year old I tried to believe in a big man in the clouds, I tried to believe in a real giant of the Jack and the Beanstalk somewhere. I tried to believe in a real cosmic Santa that gave good gifts to the gullible. I didn't do very well with that, but I did get far enough with it to join the church and get appropriately baptized. The trouble is, you and I begin in life, open to life and learning and then all of these ideas come in and we find ourselves struggling the way thorough them. Both towards the human and the divine. How do we get there, we ask. What are they trying to tell us? I eat lunch at a frozen yogurt store everyday at noon. The cost of living went up to \$1.87 the other day when they raised the price on my favorite cup of yogurt. I was in there and there was a little child there, little toddler who had just gotten a cone from his mama, and she was ordering some elaborate concoction, you know. All of the pleasure, none of the guilt. What a store. Of course, the fudge and the nuts on top on top of a no fat ice cream means you have all the pleasure and the fact the slogan tells you you have none of the guilt absolves you. What bothers me is how heavy the people are that eat in there. But the little toddler was not only showing me her cone she was offering it to me. She wanted me to take a bite of it. It was good. That's sort of what Jesus was talking about. We all start like that but I guess that's before we wise up. I was reading Fortune Magazine yesterday, that's a nasty thing to do, I only do it once a year as a sort of a spiritual discipline. And it just really made me sick, I'll tell ya. Won't go into that at this point but once you wise up like those writers in Fortune Magazine you know better than to offer anything to anybody unless it's a leverage buyout. You know, some kind of a deal. Here, the little girl is saying, taste this. It's so good I want you to have some of it. Mom immediately snatches her back from this potential child molester. The Chaplain at Stetson University may carry her off God knows where. But I mean, we learn don't we? And we learn after awhile that we don't do that sort of thing. Of course she learned quicker than that because in about 30 seconds her big brother came and grabbed it out of her hand and ate the whole top off of it. Then she cried and held it in both hands and I thought, mama doesn't need to worry anymore. That kid isn't going to be offering anything to friends much less strangers. It's not easy to become a child again. The trouble with being a child is you become vulnerable and the last thing Fortune Magazine wants to happen to you is for you to become vulnerable. You wanna become impregnable. Tough, hard. Win, win, win. That's the way life is supposed to be. Isn't that right? Amen, and amen. In religion we wanna win, we wanna be the best we wanna be the biggest. The same thing is true out there. The bottom line, that's why those books are selling like crazy, it's the bottom line. Just what we learn in kindergarten. That's the way it is. But even there, it isn't the way it is. Ultimately we find ourselves in a world where sharing is dangerous. We being to ask ourselves,

do these people know what they're talking about? Are these church people serious or are they crazy? This isn't the way to live. So religion then begins to modify itself 'till it becomes a win/win proposition. And when Jesus died on the cross it was the ultimate proof he was a loser. And many went away as they do today. The trouble is that churches need to win too because they are institutions as are denominations as are all of us. We become small institutions operating for the good of our families or our individual selves. We are John Doe comma PA. And so we begin to look at the way we can benefit ourselves and if religion can say to us, here is a gold card that you exercise when other cards don't work it becomes also a part of something tremendously useful in life. But I mean isn't this sort of turning upside down what it was Jesus seemed to be about? Wasn't what Jesus was saying essentially that it is good somehow to be vulnerable. I mean I know that doesn't make a lot of sense does it? But you see, unless you are vulnerable you're not human. Unless when you're cut you bleed. Unless you are vulnerable by being accessible you are a rock. Or at best a tree, but you're not a human being. For God to notice when a sparrow falls is to make God vulnerable. For the heavens to weep when the son of God dies upon a cross is to indicate in the great theology of it that God is suffering just like a human being. Now, the Greeks laughed at that. The idea that God suffered. What would be the advantage in that? Why be a God? Why gain all power in your life on earth and give it away? Why be vulnerable? I was at the post office the other day coming out with my mail and there was a black man about to get in the automobile next to me and riding down the sidewalk was one of the local characters that you see most places. Large, red faced fellow. Indeterminable age, 30s, 40s, who knows? Sagging britches and old belt. Dirty, dirty shirt. Unshaven, talking to himself, riding a child's bicycle with a child's lunchbox. The old fashioned kit kind that somebody'd tossed out somewhere and he had hung over his handlebars and he's looking, looking, looking and he sees the black man and he stops his bike and he gets out and he walks over and the talks earnestly, earnestly, earnestly, earnestly to the black man for awhile. I'm still waiting to get in my car watching this and in a moment the black man snugs up his tie, looks down at the street and looks around a bit, takes out his wallet. First reaches into his pocket to get change, thinks better of it, reaches in his wallet, takes out his wallet, pulls out a bill, goes back pulls out two more bills. Holds them over and puts three ones into the hand of this Florida cracker redneck whose mind never got him past the age of a child. He got into his car and left and the man got back on his bike, nodding his head in the direction of his departing friend and pedaled away. There's a lot you could think about that. The thing I thought about was, why didn't he ask it from me? Probably because he thought the other guy maybe understood more what it was like not to have everything in the world. To be vulnerable is to be human. And Jesus is saying to us, look don't grow up too much. Come in to the world of the kingdom of God. Learn what that's about. Come into the faith of Jesus of Nazareth. The wisdom of Jesus, the religion of Jesus is not a religion of wisdom. It's not a religion of reason of philosophical speculation. It is not a religion of individual mantras or serene isolation. It is not a religion of success achieving or power grabbing. It is not a religion of authorities and hierarchies, of great ones and pyramids of power, secular or religious. It is not a religion of glittering spectacle, whether secular entertainment or sacred pomp. It is not a religion of the magical endowments of its skillful practitioners doled out to the dutiful followers whether these leaders are the omniscient oracles of Protestant pulpits or the elegant wizards of Catholic cathedrals. It may be embarrassing to think in the last days of senior ministers in diapers and bishops on tricycles all waiting in line at the gate of the kingdom, but so it is. Unless you become as little children, Jesus said, who receive God's grace in one another in humility and love and trust you will never see the kingdom of God. Not in your personal lives, in your relationships of equality and not dominance, of giving and not taking, nor in your professional relationships, that look at

people not objects. Even the world. Even the creatures. And if the sparrows that fall to the ground are seen by the eyes of God, surely the spotted owl deserves more than just ridicule. Well anyway, just when we were getting a little nervous all of us standing there in the circle with the disciples around Jesus and the little child, Jesus smiled and looked up into their wide staring two adult eyes and said, aww, be of good cheer little children. It's God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Let's pray together. Unlearn us, oh Lord disabuse us, oh God from the safe notions we have that are designed to look after us and ours, but nothing else because we're going to be such short tenants on the property. Help us to return to a place of new birth where once again through your love and grace we can open our arms and embrace as you embrace a whole world, amen. (organ music) (choir singing)

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray, be seated. Almighty God in a world of constant change you have placed eternity in our hearts. In a world in which there is much moral confusion you gave us the power to discern good from evil. Grand us we pray, sincerity that we might persistently seek the things that endure in this changing world and might refuse those things which perish. That amid all those things which are vanishing and deceptive we might see the truth steadily and follow your light faithfully and grow ever richer in that love which the life of all. Oh God, we pray for the wisdom that only you can give. Not the wisdom which comes from acquisition of things of power, of the acquisition of more data, more knowledge but rather from the recognition that you are the ruler of the universe. Teach us, oh gracious, loving God to see people by the light of the faith we profess, that we may check in ourselves all ungenerous judgements, all presumptuous claims, and that recognizing the needs and rightful claims of others we might remove old hatreds and rivalries and hasten new understandings. That we might bring our tributes of excellence to the treasury of our common humanity in Jesus Christ our Lord. This day we pray especially for all those who are feeling particularly vulnerable and small. We pray for those who suffer bereavement. We pray for those who are sick and those who watch over the sick. We pray for young people who are uncertain of their future. We pray for older people who are facing a future of limited abilities. We pray for families in their struggle to love one another and to live peacefully. Oh Lord who taught us that in turning and becoming as little children we might find life. Turn us toward you, help us to let go of false securities. Open our eyes to your sustaining and guiding presence always among us reaching out to us in our vulnerability to love us, to bring us home. This in she silent petitions of our hearts we pray this day in the confidence of children, amen. Now let us offer ourselves and our gifts to the God who has offered so much to us. (organ music) (choir singing)

- Let us pray. Gracious God, for every good and perfect gift we have received in this life we give you thanks realizing that all that we treasure in life, our lives, our heath, our families, this beautiful world. All the things that make life worth living, all has come as a gift from you. Help us to glorify you in all things, to praise you not only with our lips but also with our lives. To pray to you, not simply in our prayers in church, but also the way we conduct our business. They way we live in our families and the light that we show forth to others. May all of this be offered to you and for your glory as a sign of our gratitude and thanksgiving. And now we pray as our Lord and savior Jesus has taught us saying, our father, who art in heaven hallowed be they name

thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread 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) (choir singing)  
Now 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. (organ music)