

(upbeat liturgical music) (upbeat organ music) (upbeat liturgical music)

- I will arise and go to my Father and say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and I'm no more worthy to be called thy child." Let us now make our corporate confession of our sin. Forgive us, most gracious Lord and Father, what we have done to increase the pain of the world. Pardon the unkind word, the impatient gesture, the hard and selfish deed, the failure to show sympathy and kindly help where we had the opportunity or failure to seek it. We beseech you to enable us to live the rest of our lives, that we may daily endeavor to lessen the flood of human sorrow and add to the sum of blessedness, both in our own lives and the lives of those who come in contact with us. Amen. Let us continue our prayers and in silence make our personal confession. (upbeat organ music) (upbeat liturgical music) Hear these words of God's promise as recorded in Ezekiel. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit into you." Accept these good words and rejoice in this good news. Let us pray together the prayer of our Lord. 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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and forever. Amen. (upbeat organ music) (upbeat liturgical music)

- The Epistle reading for this fourth Sunday after Epiphany is from the letter of Paul to the Colossians chapter one verses 21 through 29. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister, according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy, which he mightily inspires within me. Thus, endeth the reading. (upbeat organ music) (upbeat liturgical music)

- Let us affirm our faith. We are not alone, we live in God's world. We believe in God, who has created and is creating, who has come in the true man, Jesus, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by his spirit. We trust him, he calls us to be his church to celebrate his presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen, our judge and our hope, in life and death, and life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

- And in your spirit.

- Let us pray. O, Holy God, we are people who try to comprehend your greatness, I understand your power and vision, your love, but we cannot, but we are also people who give thanks for the glimpses of your glory, for the evidence of your power, for the gifts of your love, and the signs of your hope. We bow before you and all, and with adoration and in thanksgiving. Here now our prayers of thankfulness that you protect us and spare us the full consequences of all the hate, fear and stupidity of mankind. For peace where it exist, and for persons who give their lives in an effort toward peace for all. For persons in government, in the university, for editors and journalists, for judges and scientists, for all who risk their positions and their lives for the sake of truth and reconciliation, for the countless persons who make possible this service of worship, those who spend their working time cleaning this building, those who proclaim the good news for the secretaries, the technicians, for those whose ministry is music, for those who provide the monies, for all who work that we may worship. Above all, we thank you that we do not restrict your faithfulness to the limited realm of things for which we are grateful, but we can recognize beyond. And more important that you are open to us, and even to those things, which we ought to be grateful. O Lord, hear our prayers of petition and intercession. We pray that what we do with our time and abilities maybe a living sacrifice to you. And that we may never forget the many who cannot choose their work, and the poor who have no work or only their work. Direct our social and political struggle toward a society where all can love you and their neighbors in the midst of their daily work. We pray that the way we spend our leisure time may be a living sacrifice to you. And that we may never forget the many who are enslaved to the industry of entertainment and the poor who have no leisure or have only their leisure. Show us ways to use the blessing of automation to your glory. We pray that the style of life we have been led to chose may be a living sacrifice to you, and that we may never forget the many who are married or unmarried against their will. Release us from loneliness in the crowd, and show us our neighbor and friend. Renew your church, so that it may be more truly your family and become the new humanity. To you, O Lord, we bring our failures, our compromises, and the joy of our achievements. Overrule them and make us a part of your costly love for the world. Hear now our personal prayers of concern for those persons who are sick, for those persons who are facing crises, which seem too much for them to bear, for those persons in special need. O Lord, you know all our yearnings, send your spirit and your power that we may care for those persons for whom we have prayed. We pray in the spirit of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

- I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And may I point you to a text found in first Colossians, in Colossians the first chapter. Part of the pericope read here in our hearing this morning, it's the 23rd verse. You must continue in your faith, firm on your foundation, never to be dislodged from the hope offered in the gospel, which you have heard. A Divinity School student was standing in my office asking about a course. His question was very simple, very straightforward, "What should I expect from this course?" The answer is not important, but the question, would you ask it again and again in a great university like this? What do we expect from this degree program? What do you expect from this graduate study? Well, to be sure, if it's medicine, we would expect some particular skills in bringing health to the world, to persons. And if it's studying the law school, again, we would expect that young lawyers would be informed, so that they could participate in decisions that would cause justice to rein in our land. And in the Divinity School, what do you expect? Well, we may answer that we would hope for an increase of faith an increase of love for

God and love for neighbor. But more importantly and more specifically, what are your hopes for this place this day? Here this great gothic cathedral, standing at the head of the quad, and we're together now with choirs, with liturgy, with preacher, with congregation. What are your hopes for all of that? In very specific terms. If indeed bakers are for baking bread, and shoemakers are for making shoes, what are preachers for? And if indeed, this place was gone from the university, and its Sabbath worship, and its word of God. What, if anything, would plain men and women miss? Well, it's that kind of question that the Apostle Paul would address even as he writes the Colossians. Kingsley used to lean from his pulpit in England and say, "We are all together here to talk about the things that are most important in your life and in mine." And may I be so bold to quickly say that that's the way I see the conversation in this moment? Not because what I say is important, but because of the very nature of the conversation, you see. Holy worship, worship that's caught up in all of the salvation history that's distilled out of the experience of the race, worship that seeks the presence of the living God. And I think it's the biggest hurdle of all. How you will have to do with your Maker? How the creature will have to do with the creator and all the rest of creation? That's not a strange kind of question to many religions. But the Christian faith, as it's expressed in the book of Colossians, this pericope for today is struggling with the kind of intellectualizing of that, the gnostic heresy, if you will. There were some who said, the way you will have to do with God is by coming to very clear intellectual perception of those secrets that will let you come close to his holy spiritual presence. And they were increasingly dissatisfied, could not in fact tolerate any rude, ordinary, common kind of thing that would have God, the Holy God expressed in flesh. So here it is, that gospel, from which I would not have you dislodged or moved away from in any way at all. What kind of hope does it offer? I think first it offers a kind of hope for noble living, that if this gospel really finds its way in your life, the Christ within you kind of concept read here that your life will be marked by service and courage and faith and love and goodness. There will be a personal holiness that will make you more noble in your living. And another hope. Well, the Colossians story speaks about being blameless before God, about the hope of heaven. I knew that we are very much this worldly in our attitudes, but perhaps even that hope could cause us now to lift our eyes and seek the invisible, to stir up our hearts, to choose that which is still unseen. But it is not either of those hopes I choose to address here, it is rather this thing called a knowledge of God, to know God. And is that not the foundation of all hope? Well, you say the word very quickly, and I know that you know how, all know how to spell it: God, but it's out now. And what images has it stirred for you? What do you see? How would you define it? Could you indeed paint God? The artists of the Catholic Kings tried, it was Tintoretto that put God on a pinnacle over all the creation, above it and overseeing it, but removed from it. Is that God? One of the artists of the Catholic Kings painted God as an old man, wise and dignified, but old so that he was decaying, visibly decaying. Is that God? Raphael painted God as a little busybody-God, flying around heaven with an unborn babe in each hand. But I want you to think of the God who sees time ever-beginning and ever-ending. The source of all that is, the God who sees a thousand years is one day. I want you to think about the God who strings out worlds like pearls, who fingers out man with his right hand and beasts with his left. The God who perhaps created our earth after supper on the day when he spread the whole Milky way as a carpet at his feet. God of God, and Light of Light, and very God of very God, the way the Nicene Creed says it. How can you picture that God? The invisible God. In science we estimate that light travels 186,000 miles a second. That's faster than I can imagine. One second, and in that time light goes seven times around our earth. In almost two seconds, light comes from the moon. The light now coming through these windows from our sun has been in journey for almost eight minutes before it reaches our eye. I want you to think of the stars, the

nearest star other than our sun. We see after its light has been in journey at that fantastic speed for more than three years. On a clear night, I am told, you can count 20,000 stars with your naked eye. If you go to Palomar and use a photographic plate in that great telescope, you can count 100,000 stars. One astronomer who said, there are as many stars in God's heaven as there are specks of dust in the city of London, and the nearest three light years away. Don't you hear the wonder of it then when the Psalmist speaks in Psalm eight, "When I consider the heavens, the moon and the stars, the work of Thy fingers, O God, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the Son of Man that Thou wouldst visit him." And if there is any hope in this knowing God, it must be this God who set stars in their courses, how will you then know him? The witness of the Christian Church is that that knowledge is not held in intellectual philosophy, but it is made evident in an event, an event that began with the bouncy donkey ride, and the young mother and the new baby in a manger, and shepherds and star dust and the stable straw. And I want you to think of it in all of its earthiness, brand-new baby flesh, blotchy red, a wide-open squalling mouth, healthy baby bowels. And they say, "God! God has come among us bodily." As it says in the Colossians text, the word has become flesh. The invisible unseen God is now made known in this miracle that we call the incarnation. And it's worked out on the cross where flesh is mocked and crowned with thorns and spit upon, crucified, dead, buried. Is it any wonder that the thinking, wise, sophisticated, philosophical men of the Colossian moment were dissatisfied with such rude simplicity? How can that be? May I speak confessionally now? December 7th, 1941, I was a young boy of 11 living in a very pious home, a parsonage on the northern plains of Montana. On that Sunday of December, the radio began to bring the news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. I remember the Monday morning, a bleak wintery day. My father had listened to the news, again on that crackling old radio. He came to the table with the big Bible, and he told me to put away the Wheaties box that I was reading (laughs) all about champions, and breakfasts of champions. And then he began, "Because of the world situation we must pray, and pray earnestly." And we did. And I believe in those prayers and all of the hopes that seem to be caught up in stories of manglers, and mothers, and crosses, and resurrections. And I left that piety, and my world began to enlarge. And there was always a critical situation in the world, and I prayed, often I prayed, but I prayed again because of the condition, my own creature condition. When I came to loneliness or boredom, and life seemed to be an emptiness and a mockery that had no meaning or no possible place for celebration of fulfillment. I prayed out of my doubts and out of my despair, and I prayed when I was anxious and when I was afraid. And I prayed when I was guilt-ridden and had no sense of personal worth at all. Prayed that somehow the hope of the gospel would save me. I didn't forsake that child hope and that young hope deliberately, I simply questioned it, doubted it, and then was more attracted to philosophy. Surely that would make God clearer, known to me. Or science, let me know his world and then know the creator. And I neglected the simple story that makes the invisible God come alive for the most humble and ignorant of all God's creatures. And so I was in sympathy, you see, with the story of D.T. Niles. He told the three university students, and I felt what they were saying. It was a Good Friday, and they came across a number of people lined up, waiting to stand before the priest and to make their confession, so that they could then go and receive the sacrament of holy communion. The university students stopped for a moment, watch the procedures and then said, "Isn't that foolishness? What indeed can they hope for in that? Do they really think that they will be made blameless? And do they believe that this Christ can have anything to do with their real life now or any time? What in fact could this Jesus Christ possibly do for any one of us?" Then they came upon a rather brutal, almost blasphemous kind of decision. One of them decided to stand in line, and when he came before the priest, instead of offering a confession,

he would offer the questioning blasphemy. And it wasn't long until there he was, and the priest was hearing him say, "It's foolishness. How indeed can it present me blameless? What possible hope is there in it? What can Christ do for me?" And before he could finish, the priest was out of that booth and standing beside him and saying, "Young, man, I want you to do something. I dare you to do it. I want you to go to the front of the church, you'll find the crucifix there, I want you to look up at it. And then say in words, not usually spoken in church, but words that clearly sum up what you have just said to me. You look at it and you say, 'Jesus Christ died for me, but I don't give a damn.'" The young man was surprised, but he made his way to the front of the church. He stood there before the figure of the crucifix and he said, "Jesus Christ died for me, and I don't give a damn." And he turned and started to leave the church, the priest caught him, "Can you do that again?" he said. "I dare you." Hesitatingly but deliberately, the young man came and stood before the crucifix, the form of heaven's very best, God's own son, and he was saying again the words, "Jesus Christ died for me, and I don't give a damn." He started to rush from the church this time, and the priest caught him. "I dare you, do it again, face the Christ again." Hesitatingly he stood before the crucifix, he looked up at the nail-pierced hands and feet, and he made the words, "Jesus Christ died for me, and..." He turned to the priest and said, "Will you hear my confession now?" I have learned that I'm set here in flesh. It's the most ordinary stuff about me, and so are you. And last night in the farm fields of North Carolina, foxes were hunting, and if they found rabbits, they would kill them and eat them. Fleshes in season, the lions hunt in Kenya, they can kill a man, and in our cities there is violence. Flesh, ah, it's exploited to the applause of fight fans, it's marketed and bartered in the ranks of pro-football. It is dressed up and paraded in Miss America pageants, exploited for the profit of drug-pushers. Prostituted. Autopsied. Buried. All flesh is in season, your flesh is in season. But I speak to you of a hope that is in the gospel, that in a moment when God would make himself known to you, he came among us bodily. For all of the intellectual attractions, for all of your doubts, may I speak to each one of you who has faith, a simple word. Stand firm in that faith. Don't be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Let us pray. Lord, our God, thou knowest who we are, and from whence we've come to this place. We are the faithful or we are the half-faithful, or we are unfaithful, but now O God, let us know again, that Thy gift of Christ, our Lord and Savior is for each of us and for all of us. In our prayers of confession and in our prayers of affirmation, O God, make Christ real in us, a hope of glory. Amen. (upbeat organ music) (upbeat liturgical music)

- The Duke University ministers extend a special welcome to the many persons who listen to the Sunday worship services regularly on WDNC. We feel it may be helpful to you who worship by radio, to have a copy of the Sunday bulletin, so you can follow the prayers. The Scripture readings read the words to anthem since they have song, can know the organ music being played and know who the participants are. If you would like to receive the Sunday bulletin and other chapel mailings in advance, please send your name and address to: Duke Chapel, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Once enough names are secured to get a bulk mailing permit, we will begin mailing the bulletin to you. The address again is: Duke Chapel, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. (upbeat liturgical music) (upbeat organ music) (upbeat liturgical music) (upbeat organ music) (upbeat liturgical music)

- O Lord, from whom we receive all, and upon whom we are dependent, accept this offering of ourselves before you onto the service of all persons. Use our being and our doing, our gifts and our goods for your glory and the wellbeing of all of your creation. To you be all glory and honor forever. Amen. (upbeat organ

music) (upbeat liturgical music) Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage, render to no persons evil for evil, strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted on all persons. Love and serve the Lord rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the blessing of God Almighty. Father, Son, and Holy spirit be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen. (upbeat liturgical music) (church bell rings) (upbeat organ music)