

- Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (bright organ music) (loud scraping)

- I regret that I am having some little difficulty with the clip on the microphone, which has, at this moment broken. So if you will bear with me for two or three seconds, while I try to repair it. (loud scraping) Let us pray. Almighty and ever blessed God, who has spoken thy Word once and for all unto men, in and through thy son, Jesus Christ, speak now thy Word in our hearts, that it might become for us sanctification and life through this same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Some two weeks ago, in the York Chapel of the Divinity School here, I offered a meditation on the Biblical theme of faith, faith defined as waiting upon God. And today, I craved the leave of our divinity students to repeat at the outset of this sermon, the gist of what I said on that occasion. And we turn first to the prophet Isaiah's words about waiting upon God. "They that wait upon the Lord," declares the prophet, "Shall renew their strength. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles. "They shall run and not be weary, "and they shall walk and not faint." What is this waiting upon God that enables men in the first bright morning of newfound faith to scale the shining height, like the golden eagles once soar amid the Scottish mountains of Glencoe last summer? And then laterally, what is more significant, enables them to endure the frets and frustrations of the common dusty day with steadiness and sanity, with balance and self control? Beyond question, the prophet Isaiah is not alluding to the beneficence effect in a man's life of participation in the practice of the cultists, nor of the regular dutiful performance of prescribed religious rights. Rather, this waiting upon God concerns men's fundamental attitude towards the future. Our lives happen to be far more profoundly conditioned than we realize by the manner in which we regard the future. To be sure, the future for most of us may be defined as the time in which justice will, at length, be done, in which our own ambitions and wishes will come to fruition and our own seeming merits be recognized on every hand. Consequently, the present moment of our life is characterized for most of us by a very tense and nervous striving to win applause, either by achievement, or by affectation, by apoplectic and convulsive efforts to impress other people. Now to wait upon God means to be delivered from the tyrannous grip of a great, dreamed of future for ourselves. It means the recognition that the future cannot be forced by any one of us, that tomorrow is God's tomorrow and not our own. For tonight, we may die, and all our worldly expectations die with us. It is precisely this meaning of waiting upon God that is marvelously filled out and perfected by Jesus of Nazareth in the Beatitudes. Here, the Christian, the man of faith is portrayed as he essentially the one who waits, who is moving toward the future which God alone will bring. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," says Jesus, and the poor in spirit are those who are so freed from the shackles of the world's glittering prizes that their eyes are turned toward the future, which God alone will grant. "Blessed are they that mourn," says Jesus, and the mourners are those who, with compassion and a broken heart are awaiting the consolation of our world from the sight of God. And similarly, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are the men and women who live in ardent hope of God's intervention to rescue or redeem this benighted world from sin and corruption and death. But you will ask me, are not all men given with their existence an innate discontentment with the present, and the hope for a better future? Yes, of course. We are all given that hope, but the differentiating factor among us lies in the way we picture the future. Now we have witnessed in our day and age, the rise to universal prominence of a philosophy that

is no less concerned about the future than is Christianity. Marxist teaching or Bolshevism is motivated by a secular doctrine of the future. It is motivated by its dream of the kingdom of God without God and it fuels itself irresistibly impelled towards the future of coming classless society. Ironically enough, in the course of her history, the church has raised up not a few men who have made unwitting concessions to the Marxist way of looking at things by claiming Jesus, first and foremost, as an ally in the social revolutionary struggle for a new world order, planned and engineered by man. But in fact, Jesus' view of the future is radically different from the secular ideal of a coming socialist utopia in our earth and in our time. For the man who waits upon God as Jesus intends it, is found still waiting upon God in confidence and faith and trust even when the acid realities of our history have destroyed all hope of our paradise upon earth. Rudolph Bultmann expressed it very well in one of his Marburg sermons. "To move towards the future does not mean," he says, "to desire to mold it "by our human planning and carefulness." "Equally little does it mean to expect "from the future the fulfillment of all our selfish desires. "But it does mean that we travel toward this unknown, "this darkness, with our heart and mind open "for what God wills to make of us." Now, at that point ended our York Chapel exercise on the theme of faith defined as waiting upon God. And the immediate sequel to it was that several students came around like hornets in a sense, protesting vigorously that to define Christianity as no more than waiting on God, waiting on the future as God's future is merely to advise an inward attitude of passivity before God, and sort of cut the narrative of all responsible social good works and endeavor. It is precisely because I would not have so important a matter thus misunderstood, that I am taking this opportunity of pressing it further. I, too, happen to believe that any faith or any waiting upon God that does not bear immediate fruit in redemptive social action and righteous conduct is a spurious, profitless, and dead thing, a merely false religiosity. Let us turn, for a moment, seeking illumination of this point through Christ's parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In that parable, we may presume that the rich man was a person of broad cultural and spiritual horizons, of discerning taste and with both the knack and the leisure for the contemplative life. An expert judge, perhaps, of objets d'art and ripe old vintages. But poor Lazarus, he never noticed. He may have thought to himself that if you start to take account of beggars and dogs and flies, where could you ever stop? But surely, there is something very seriously wrong with the man who cannot understand that a dying beggar has more claim on his attention than the higher and more cherished objects of his cultural and spiritual aspirations. So it is, I believe in the realm of faith. If a self-professed religious man can shut his eyes at Lazarus, then we can only conclude that he is not really religious at all, certainly not in any authentic Christian sense. For wherever God is given room in the life of any man who waits for him, love for beggars and renovation is never very far away. "Faith is the doer and love the deed," as Martin Luther once said. Will you allow me a personal reminiscence at this point? My own early years were spent against a background of social unrest and economic distress in Scotland in the late 1920s and '30s. I first came to the church in the conviction that Christianity was synonymous with every honest movement for reform of the social or economic or political system. And so, boys as we were, with all the enthusiasm of youth, we gave ourselves, some of us, to trying to tidy up in a small enough way, no doubt, some of the slums of Glasgow, and we felt that in doing this, all the rest would follow, and the kingdom of heaven wouldn't be too long. But back in Glasgow recently, one didn't see any real signs of the kingdom of heaven. Now, of course I do still believe with all my heart beyond all doubt, the sinister fact of one-roomed houses, of poverty and class discrimination, all that is the queerest kind of commentary on the so-called Christianity among us, and it's also a direct insult to God. If we were even halfway Christian, we must be up and doing about things like that. I, too, share that belief with you. But nowadays, in the light of

what I sincerely hope is a greater maturity, I can recognize that it's all a question in the last analysis of emphasis and of method. How can we help things best? Whence do we derive our inspiration? What is to be the order of our priorities? Since those days of the 1920s, there has been abundant social effort in our land, laudable social effort and well conceived. Yet for all that, our societies still lie stricken and scarred from the same old diseases. Our societies remain unredeemed. As I said, the kingdom of heaven has not drawn conspicuously nearer to our earth. When I was back in Britain recently, I chanced to see dear old Bertrand Russell in a television program. I trust I did him no injustice in reading from the lines on his face his own disenchantment with this, our world, and his own chagrin at the failure of men to live out the ethic of human kindness and benevolence he has so long advocated as the surest key to society's reformation. You know, perhaps we ourselves, though calling ourselves Christian, are really not so very different after all from the humanitarian philosopher. Perhaps our own daydreams have been all too earthy. Perhaps also our biggest hopes have been placed in man, and in man's ability, unaided and alone, to bring in the day of brotherhood, and end the night of wrong. Perhaps we, too, have thought to renew our decaying social structures by powers drawn from within these structures themselves. And perhaps, if you have moods like me, you may be feeling, as I often feel, thwarted and tired, because even our best social endeavors have apparently proven quite incapable of dragging out the tangled roots of evil from our midst. And that is why I have no fear of saying in the end, that we are driven back upon the point from which we started. We must begin with God. We must begin with God, despite the popular humanistic teaching of our day, which alleges confidently that we are really not much helped by those who are bothering about the future, least of all God's future. The humanist says that we are rather helped most by those who are throwing themselves busily and energetically into the present. I would venture to affirm, with every voice in the New Testament behind me, and the sober facts of history to support me, that on the contrary, it is only those who have stood where the world and its possibilities end, and whose minds are filled with the unseen future of God, it is only those who are nothing daunted when all earthly expectations fade away. It is only those who really are going to retain the strength and valor to dare the best things for us here and now. In this, as in other things, I suggest, Jesus the Christ himself is our great exemplar. The gospels portray Jesus as the one who flings himself entirely on the mercy of God and who is prepared to leave the future to God. Even so, and only so, freed as he is from all illusory hopes of a great earthly, manmade future, is he sustained by a vision of God's coming order of things high enough to constrain in him those repeated acts of love and of compassion which strike at the heart of the most intractable social problems. The essence of a Christian life we may fairly say is to be united with this Jesus Christ. And if so, we shall be united with him, primarily in turning our eyes in faith like him, towards the future that God alone can bring. When we have learned thus to wait upon the future as God's future, it instantly becomes for us a unique inspiration, an inspiration that the world cannot give and that worldly men do not possess, an inspiration driving us like him into the field of service. "Blessed are they that mourn," says Jesus. The mourners are those among us who are awaiting the consolation of this tormented world from the sight of God. And as the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, following the Beatitudes very clearly shows, the mourners are, at the same time those whose impregnable hope in God and in God's future challenges and empowers them for refashioning the world here and now in accordance with God's own holy will and purpose, and unto this God be the glory. Let us pray. Almighty and ever blessed God, before whose face the generations rise and fall away, grant us that in this, our generation, we may catch a glimpse of thine eternal city, not made with hands, that this vision of faith, of a higher order of things than the earthly order, may sustain us and lay an irresistible constraint upon us, to love our fellow

men in repeated acts of compassion, and redemptive concern, that through our faith, the fruits of loving kindness may be born, and our society lifted up towards God's holy will and purpose for it. And unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost do we now ascribe all honor and glory, majesty, dominion and power, world without end. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Ah, ah, ah, ah ♪ ♪ Ah, ah, ah, ah ♪ ♪ Ah, amen ♪ ♪ Ah, ah, ah, amen ♪ ♪ Ah, ah, amen ♪ ♪ Ah, amen ♪