

(organ music)

- May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. I am Margaret Via, presiding minister this morning and pastor of Duke University Chapel Congregation. I welcome you to this service of worship at Duke Chapel. Worshiping with us in celebration of Employee Sunday are many employees of Duke University including the Duke Employee Choir who join with our Summer Chapel Choir in our music ministry this morning. Also worshiping with us are students and families who are here for Duke's Talent Identification Program. Our guest preacher this morning is the Reverend Mrs. Joan Salmon-Campbell, a nationally-acclaimed preacher who is the Associate Director for the Mission Program Office of the Philadelphia Presbytery. We welcome her again to this pulpit. And now may we continue our worshiping together. (muffled singing) (organ music) (organ music drowns out congregation singing) (organ music) (organ music drowns out congregation singing)

- May we pray. Oh loving God, renew our spirits and draw our hearts to thyself that our work may not be to us a burden but a delight. And giveth such love to thee as may sweeten all our obedience. Help us that we may serve thee with cheerfulness and gladness delighting ourselves in thee and rejoicing in all that is to the honor of thy name through Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Let us pray together 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 might hear with joy what you say to us this day. Amen.

- The first lesson is taken from Genesis. Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred "and your father's house to the land that I will show you. "And I will make of you a great nation, "and I will bless you and make your name great, "so that you will be a blessing. "I will bless those who bless you, "and him who curses you I will curse, "and by you all the families of the earth "shall bless themselves." This ends the reading of the first lesson.

- Will you read responsibly Psalms 57 number 572 in the hymnal. Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me.

Congregation: For in thee my soul takes refuge.

- In the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge.

Congregation: Till the storms of destruction pass by.

- I cry to God Most High.

Congregation: To God who fulfills his purpose for me.

Pastor: He will send from heaven and save me.

Congregation: God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness.

Pastor: Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Congregation: Let thy glory be over all the earth.

- My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast.

Congregation: I will sing and make melody.

- I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, among the peoples.

Congregation: I will sing praises to thee among the nations.

- For thy steadfast love is great to the heavens.

Congregation: Thy faithfulness to the clouds.

- Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Congregation: Let thy glory be over all the earth. (organ music) ♪ Glory be to our creator ♪ ♪ Praise to our redeemer Lord ♪ ♪ Glory be to our sustainer ♪ ♪ Ever three and ever one ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ Now and ever more shall be ♪ (organ music) ♪ O pray for the peace of Jerusalem ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪ ♪ O pray for the peace of Jerusalem ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪ ♪ O pray for the peace of Jerusalem ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪ ♪ Peace be within thy walls ♪ ♪ And plenteousness within thy palaces ♪ ♪ Peace be within thy walls ♪ ♪ Peace be within thy walls ♪ ♪ And plenteousness within thy palaces ♪ ♪ Peace be within thy walls ♪ ♪ And plenteousness within thy palaces ♪ ♪ O pray for the peace of Jerusalem ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪ ♪ O pray for the peace of Jerusalem ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪ ♪ They shall prosper that love thee ♪

- Good morning. Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

- I'm going to need you to talk back to me this morning. Then I know you're out there. Let us prepare to hear

the word of the gospel as it comes from the Gospel of Luke 14:15-24. Hear the word of the Lord. When one of those who was sitting at table with Jesus heard this, he said, "Happy is the man who eats bread in the kingdom of God." Jesus said to him, "There was a man who made a great banquet "and invited many people to it. "At the time of the banquet he sent his servants "to say to those who had been invited, "'Come, because everything is now ready.' "With one accord, they all began to make excuses. "The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, "'and I must go out to see it. "'Please have me excused.' "Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, "'and I am on my way to try them out. "'Please have me excused.' "Another said, 'I have married a wife, "'and therefore I cannot come.' "So, the servant came and told his master these things. "The master of the house was enraged "and said to his servant, "'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the town "'and bring here the poor and the maimed "'and the blind and the lame.' "The servant said, 'Sir, your orders have been carried out, "'and there is still room.' "So, the master said to his servant, "'Go out to the roads and to the hedges "'and compel them to come in so that my house may be filled "'for I tell you that none of these who were invited "'shall taste my banquet.'" Here ends the reading of God's words, dear friends. Take it and use it. I welcome you to this very special party that has been prepared for you in this holy space here in Duke Chapel. My, you are a somber crowd this morning to be partying. I hope you do something about your faces before we get finished. And to do that I'm going to ask that as we go to any party usually we are eager to find out who is there and we are eager to be welcomed. I'm going to dare to do something, and I hope the Lord and the Holy Spirit will anoint you to join me in welcoming each other here to this place this morning. Would you turn to somebody behind you, not on either side of you, and say, "God loves you, and so do I." Right now. (congregation chatters) Mmm mmm mmm, doesn't that feel good? You see, my grandma would say, ♪ There's plenty good room ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Good room in my father's kingdom ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Just choose your seat and sit down ♪ ♪ I would not be a liar ♪ ♪ I'll tell you the reason why ♪ ♪ 'Cause if my Lord should call on me, child ♪ ♪ I wouldn't be ready to die ♪ ♪ Oh, plenty good room ♪ ♪ There's plenty good room ♪ ♪ Good room in my father's kingdom ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Just choose your seat and sit down ♪ ♪ I would not be a backslider ♪ ♪ I'll tell you the reason why ♪ ♪ 'Cause if my Lord should call on me ♪ ♪ I wouldn't be ready to die ♪ ♪ Oh, there's plenty good room ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Good room in my father's kingdom ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Plenty good room ♪ ♪ Just choose your seat and sit down ♪ Well, you've chosen your seats already. Let's get on with the party. What is the party? It is life of all humankind. Who is the host? God is the host. And who are the guests? You and I and all of humanity wherever they might be, whatever their predicament in life, anyone who acknowledges that God is creator. From the beginning of salvation history, God extended an invitation to this party of life. And he said to humans, namely Adam and Eve, "You're to have a ball, Adam and Eve. "For I'm going to sit you inside of paradise. "And there you shall have no want. "There you will have dominion, not domination over, "but dominion over all that I have created. "But there is only one thing that you must not do. "You must not eat from the tree of knowledge." Adam and Eve being just like you and me, you know it's like that room off the party room where the door is closed and you wonder, "I wonder what's behind there "and why the hostess didn't leave that open "so we could go in there also." Curious as they were, they just had to taste that apple. And they took a bite. And can you imagine what life must have been like prior to that bite? Can you imagine what your life and my life might have been like if in fact by faith we believed that God intended that ours was to be a life filled with joy? A life filled with possibility for good living. A sense of wholeness and satisfaction. A joy capable of a peace within that passes understanding. That was God's invitation, and in reality it still is God's invitation to you and me. We know

for a fact that Adam and Eve were not alone for Lot's wife also just had to make her own choice. She just had to look back when she had an invitation to get on with the party. She just had to look behind her. Esau missed the party also because he was hungry, and he would rather have a bowl of porridge instead. But when we think of Abram and Noah and a few others within salvation history, we know that there are a few even as there are today who can in fact participate completely in the party which God has prepared for us, who respond completely to the invitation that God extends to us. For we know that because Abram was obedient that he was able to go, not even knowing what the party was going to be like. He just heard that it was going to be a party. Go from your country, and I will show you where it's going to be. And on pure faith and trust in who the host was, he was able to not only find blessing for himself but also blessing for all the families of the earth who through him would bless themselves. When we take a very close look at the guests who came or were invited to this party in this short parable of the king's feast, we must note their choice and the consequences because they refused. And I ask you to hear it as more than a story but rather compare their excuses to your own life and the ways in which you too and I too refuse to participate in this wonderful opportunity called life that God has prepared in the name of Jesus Christ. The first man had bought a field and was off to see it. Like you and me, we have a tendency to be so immersed in this world that we have no time to worship, no time to pray. The pace is so busy in the course of a day that we just don't pause and take time to give God the glory. The second bought five yoke of oxen and wanted to try them out. The claim of novelty tends to usurp our claim or God's claim through Jesus Christ on our lives. For many times when we have a new boat or a new car or a new house which we've just finished, it's much more important that we go there on a Sunday than that we make sure that no matter what is new and novel in our lives, that there is still room for the Christ. New possessions seem to take up so much of our time that again God is frequently overlooked. The third man has married a wife, a reminder to us that even good and purposeful things and duties tend to crowd God out of our lives. I happen to be married to a gorgeous 6'3" gray-eyed man who has a very special way of letting me know how much he loves me. And sometimes we are so into each other and we are so into our family and the many blessings therein that I say, "Lord, this sure is good." And I don't think about the Lord really at all, that it is God's gift to us that we have one another. We must not even let those whom we love so dearly be loved more than God. For we are told that our God is a jealous God, and God does not want us to love anything or anybody more than we love God, God's self. And how is that we shall come to this party? You can imagine that those people who came in from the highways and the byways didn't have on their best party clothes. In fact, many of them might have been street people. In fact, they were probably persons whose appearance would not be considered proper to most of us gathered in this holy place this morning. But what we are to know is that God could care less about the kind of clothes we wear externally. It is more important that we come into the presence of the living God with a contrite heart, with clear intentions that we want God's will to flow around us, to fill us up and flow through us, with a complete commitment to experience the fullness of the life abundant in Jesus name not in our salaries or our CD notes or our pension plans or all the things that humans tend to make that describe and make for security. I want to say to you this morning, my friends, that the party is not over. Oh, if I could wiggle my nose and have you claim of the joy in being able to praise God this morning together in this holy place. I come to give you words of exhortation as well as serve words of caution. To those of us who are also members of the host's family as well as guests attending this party of life, we run the risk of becoming like Lot's wife, looking back and continuously wishing for the things and the unencumbered lifestyles that used to be. Like Esau, we become more concerned with the temporary satiating of the body's

sincere desire than the right to the tree of life, no matter what the circumstances do to our faith in a living God. Or we become like that ruler in Acts who through his power and position and other folks' skills and hard labor was able to feed God's children during a famine. After they were fed, he boasted of what he had done rather than of what the Lord had done. And he fell dead and the Bible said, "And worms consumed his body." He was forgotten, but the Lord's name and purpose prevailed, and believers grew in numbers. There are many people, even within this sanctuary at this moment, who want to believe more deeply, more earnestly that the good news is theirs individually and corporately to possess. Our challenge is to discern how do we participate in God's party while we are at work, while we are at play, as well as while we are gathered as the people of God. There are some things I'd like for you to take home with you from this party this morning. As the body, members of this host's family, I challenge and charge you to dare to go out of here and continue the party by first of all remembering that we must climb down from the perch of our own kind of piety and holiness or competence or whatever forms of delusion we offer ourselves and simply accept the fact that we are human beings. We all need as individuals to daily experience some sort of conversion, an experience like the one which stripped Saul of his pharisaic zeal and turned him into a blind, frightened, and humbled man who had to begin where we all must begin: with the fact that he was a Saul, nothing more and nothing less. He was a human being just trying to work out his soul salvation like every other human being. Regardless of station in life or predicament in life, we each must have that conversion encounter day after day after day. Not because we have to let the world know it, but let God know that you have in fact been attuned to God's will and God's use of your life. The second need for the family is to remember that God is the host of your life individually and our life corporately. You do not belong to yourself. You do not belong to your parents, young people. You do not belong to your spouses. You do not belong to your jobs. You are God's property. We are created by a living God. And the host of our life is also the host of our enemies' lives, of the street people's lives, of AIDS victims' lives, of the gay community's lives, of alcoholics' lives, of cancer victims' lives. God is host of each of those person's lives, and we are required to learn to how to accept one another and especially individually for the full dimension of their humanity. There must be an end of thinking that somehow my life is a little bit better because I'm me as I look at others who are very different from me. We must find a way, dear friends, to acknowledge that each of us are heirs to the kingdom if we dare to call ourselves Christians. Because Jesus made us friends, therefore giving us full access to all that his father God had given him. The third need is to accept the idea that as the body of Christ we must work together. We cannot be selfish with our inheritance. We cannot as Methodists be in one corner and Presbyterians in another corner and Episcopalians in another corner and people who have no label whatsoever doing something else. As black people or white people or green people or polka dot people each in their little niches doing their own little thing taking of me and mine and our kind and not worrying. We must become a koinonia. We must truly become, if we call ourselves Christians, the body of Christ anew in the world. It means that we dare to take the time even in church, y'all, to turn around and speak to somebody and allow the love of God and the Christ in you to bless somebody else even if they are a total stranger. Because apparently, everyone gathered in this place is Christian, a part of you and you are a part of them. Make sure you meet the new part of yourself before you leave this place today. The koinonia is the place, you see, to find support, to find affirmation. It is the place where we pray with and for each other, we weep with each other, we rejoice with each other, and we keep each other human. We are called to experience a love that is so strong among us that everyone within reach can accept the worst and the best about themselves. The fourth need for the family of the host is to seek to be more like Jesus Christ. You see,

Jesus accepted the limitation and the risk of being human like you and like me. Risking is living life and building relationships without knowing the beginning from the ending. It is giving a gift and stepping towards someone without ever knowing for sure how that act will be received. Rather than pouting or saying, "I better not do that because I might offend," you dare to reach out and love anyway even if it is refused. Someone has said that our culture has developed the perfect gift culture. We have washed the risk out of giving even in our worship services. It seems that the institutional church we have allowed ourselves as the corporate body to come close to insulting our host the living God, the host of this banquet that is spread and you are the food for the banquet. For we are more preoccupied with efficiency than we are with effectiveness. We risk finding ourselves eliminating the opportunity for unashamed adoration of God. If somebody said amen in here, the walls would probably shake because they just couldn't keep still. We do not give ourselves any opportunity to taste the joy and the juice of being alive in the power and the name of Jesus Christ no matter how sophisticated or educated we might be. Oh, how I pray the Holy Spirit would move in such a way that you too who call yourselves Christians this morning here would find yourselves just a little bit different when you walk out of this church today. Jesus has extended anew the invitation to you and me, friends. No longer servants but friends as he has taken away the curse and he has blessed us. We have become a family of blessing, both the recipient of and giver of blessings. In closing, we must be reminded this Lord's day that if you and I are to be the body of Christ anew in the world, we must remember that because God came, became human in Jesus Christ, we can dare to be no more than ourselves. Offering ourselves just as we are. Daring to break ourselves off and give it away to another human being just as Jesus gave his life for you and me. Because of Jesus' love and acceptance of us we must begin even in fumbling ways to accept others and to love even those who seem unlovable. Because God through Jesus Christ is the host of their lives. Because of Jesus Christ the fellowship of sharing is possible. The love, praises, interdependence, the suffering together, rejoicing and celebrating, the risking are his gifts. Because Jesus Christ hosted a party in which he himself was the bread and wine and which he gave even the deniers and the betrayers something to eat and drink, you and I dare to have the courage to come to this party and go into the party out in the world and give your life as the bread and the wine that offers new hope, new life, new possibility that others may claim Jesus as their Lord and savior. Come on, y'all, let's party. Let us pray. Holy God, we thank you for this day, for the richness of the gift of your love. We thank you that you have given us the opportunity to be the presence of your son again in the world. Oh God, loose the shackles that bind us. Soften the muscles in our face, and allow the smile of Christ to come through our eyes and our faces and bless one another. Teach us how to reach out, Lord, first and love each other gathered in this holy place. Lord, give us the courage to risk breaking our lives for those close to us and far from us. Not just for our sake but for your sake and for your people's sake. Not only in this place but all over your world. In Jesus name we pray all of these things. Let God's people say amen.

Congregation: Amen. (organ music) ♪ O God of earth and altar ♪ ♪ Bow down and hear our cry ♪ ♪ Our earthly rulers falter ♪ ♪ Our people drift and die ♪ ♪ The walls of gold entomb us ♪ ♪ The swords of scorn divide ♪ ♪ Take not thy thunder from us ♪ ♪ But take away our pride ♪ ♪ From all that terror teaches ♪ ♪ From lies of tongue and pen ♪ ♪ From all the easy speeches ♪ ♪ That comfort cruel men ♪ ♪ From sale and profanation ♪ ♪ Of honor and the sword ♪ ♪ From sleep and from damnation ♪ ♪ Deliver us, good Lord ♪ ♪ Tie in a living tether ♪ ♪ The prince and priest and thrall ♪ ♪ Bind all our lives together ♪ ♪ Smite us and save us all ♪ ♪ In ire and exultation ♪ ♪ Aflame with faith and free ♪ ♪ Lift up a living nation ♪ ♪ A single sword to thee ♪

