

**dcrmv001141001.mkv / William H. Willimon - "Do You Think That I Have Come to Bring Peace?"  
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(inspirational organ music)

- Morning and welcome to Duke Chapel. We are pleased that you are with us, particularly our visitors. Next Sunday our Duke Chapel Choir will be back with us as we begin a new school year together for orientation Sunday, with our new chapel choir director Dr. Rodney Winecoup. If you are a singer we invite you to audition for the Duke Chapel Choir. And now let us continue our worship. (inspirational organ music) ♪ The Church's one foundation ♪ ♪ Is Jesus Christ her Lord ♪ ♪ She is His new creation ♪ ♪ By water and the Word ♪ ♪ From heav'n He came and sought her ♪ ♪ To be His holy Bride ♪ ♪ With His own blood He bought her ♪ ♪ And for her life He died ♪ ♪ Elect from every nation ♪ ♪ Yet one o'er all the earth ♪ ♪ Her charter of salvation ♪ ♪ One Lord, one faith, one birth ♪ ♪ One holy Name she blesses ♪ ♪ Partakes one holy food ♪ ♪ And to one hope she presses ♪ ♪ With every grace endued ♪ ♪ 'Mid toil and tribulation ♪ ♪ And tumult of her war ♪ ♪ She waits the consummation ♪ ♪ Of peace for evermore ♪ ♪ Till with the vision glorious ♪ ♪ Her longing eyes are blest ♪ ♪ And the great Church victorious ♪ ♪ Shall be the Church at rest ♪ ♪ Yet she on earth hath union ♪ ♪ With God the Three in One ♪ ♪ And mystic sweet communion ♪ ♪ With those whose rest is won ♪ ♪ O happy ones and holy ♪ ♪ Lord, give us grace that we ♪ ♪ Like them, the meek and lowly ♪ ♪ In love may dwell with Thee ♪

- Almighty God, you have given your only son to be for us a sacrifice for sin and also an example of godly life. Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life. Through Jesus Christ, your son, our lord, Amen. Let us pray. Open our hearts and minds, oh 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 Old Testament lesson comes from the book of Jeremiah. Oh Lord, you have deceived me. And I was deceived. You are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing stock all the day. Everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak I cry out. I shout, violence and destruction. For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say I will not mention God, or speak anymore God's name, there is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones. And I am weary withholding it in, and I cannot. For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side. Denounce him, let us denounce Jeremiah, say all my familiar friends watching for my fall. Perhaps he will be deceived, then we can overcome him and take revenge on him. But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior. Therefore my persecutors will stumble. They will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. Oh Lord of host, you try the righteous, you see the heart and the mind. Let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for God has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of the evildoers. Thus ends the reading of the Old Testament lesson. Let us stand now and join in the responsive reading of the Psalter. Arise, oh Lord, oh God lift up your hand. Forget not the afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God and think you will not call to account?

Parishioners: You see, for you note mischief and vexation that you may take it into your hands the helpless

commits himself to you. you have been the helper of the fatherless.

- Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer, seek out their wickedness until you find none. God is ruler forever and ever. The nations shall perish from God's land.

Parishioners: O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted you will strengthen their heart you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more. (inspirational organ music) (background noise drowns out other sounds) (inspirational organ music) (background noise drowns out other sounds) (inspirational organ music)

- The epistle lesson comes from the book of Hebrews. Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith who, for the joy that was set forth before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with all people and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one failed to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble. And by it, the many who become defiled. That no one be immoral or irreligious, like Essau. Who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when Essau desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected for he found no chance to repent, although he sought it with tears.

- A personal word, though the bulletin doesn't indicate it, both our lector and our soloist today are students to Duke Divinity School. Fran Moody and Debby Luther. Both of them will serve as interns in the ministry of the chapel this year. Debby Luther has the additional distinction of being a native of South Carolina and this summer she was the recipient, learned that she is the recipient of the Bessie Parker Scholarship. And Bessie Parker was a united Methodist Minister in South Carolina and was my wife's Grandmother. And so, that's very special to us, that she has the Bessie Parker Scholarship. And they are typical of the fine people preparing for ministry at our divinity school. Today's scripture, gospel, is from the gospel according to Luke chapter 12. Let us attend to the word. In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another, he began to say to his disciples, I came to cast fire upon the earth and would that it would already kindle. I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I constrained until it is accomplished. Do you think that I have come to bring peace on Earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two, and two against three. They will be divided. Father against son, and son against father. Mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother. Mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law. He said also to the multitudes, when you see a cloud rising in the west you say at once a shower is coming and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing you say there will be scorching heat, and it happens. Well you hypocrites, you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? Well what did you do this summer? We did nothing special. It was a kind of restful summer. We had a number of trips to the lake in a new family boat. We went here and there, but I suppose in a way that's what summers are supposed to be, that's a good

summer. When it's restful and when it's peaceful. What did you do this restful peaceful summer? At the beginning of the summer, on Sunday May 7th, the day of Panama's elections, Father Nicholas VanCleaf, a priest working in Panama, was stopped by a soldier as he drove through his parish inviting people to come to mass. The soldier got in the back of VanCleaf's car and ordered him to drive to the local garrison. On the way, the soldier fired point blank range into Father VanCleaf's head, killing him. A United Church of Christ in the Philippines fact finding team, after investigating the double murder of a United Church of Christ minister and her husband, reported this summer that political and military motives lay behind their deaths. Visminda Grand, an ordained United Church of Christ in the Philippines Pastor, and her husband Levello Grand were murdered on May 1st by five men using high powered fire arms. The Grand's left two children who were witnesses to their murders. Park Sang Yung, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, was deported this summer while on his way to a church meeting. Catholic priest Neal McGill of the New Life Workers Center in Taiwan, was expelled from that country in June. In a statement from Hong Kong where he was forced to go, McGill described his 10 years of mission work. He said while in Taiwan I tried to help the workers build a better life for themselves. My work is part of Evangelization. It's part of the work of the church. I tried to stand with the workers in their efforts to obtain their rights. In remarks made a few days before the Chinese military's bloody crack down on student demonstrations in Beijing, Bishop K.H. Ding, president of the China Christian Counsel, declared that Chinese Christian leaders were in solid support of the students. This is the last that has been heard in public from Bishop Ding. Well what did you do this summer? This peaceful, restful, peaceful summer? Well, let's say that it was summer. The weather had been mild that summer in Judea. The fields were green and cool. Winds blew off the Mediterranean from the west. And Luke says that great crowds were following Jesus. So many thousands of the multitude that they trod on one another. They were just so many crowds. Jesus, Luke is happy to report, is catching on. He's becoming a religious celebrity. And it's interesting at that point Luke says Jesus turned to the multitudes and said everyone to whom much is given of that person will much be required. And of him to who much is committed will much more be demanded. I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled. Do you think I've come to give peace on Earth? No, I tell you but rather division. For henceforth in one house will be five divided. Three against two and two against three. They will be divided father against son, and son against father, and mother against daughter, and daughter against mother, divided. Now I dare say the multitudes got slim after they heard Jesus' thoughts on family life. Do you think I've come to bring peace on Earth, asked Jesus. Well, yes, we reply. Yes, that's exactly what we think. Isn't that what the angels sang at your birth? Glory to God in the highest and on Earth peace. Now in the heat of August, Jesus asks do you think I have come to give peace? I wonder if G.K. Chesterton was reading this passage from Luke when he noted, "The Christ of the Gospels might seem actually "more strange and terrible than the Christ of the church." Christ in the deadening clutch of the clergy, is a good deal more tame than Jesus, wild and unfettered of the Gospels. When asked what he thought was the greatest challenge facing American Christianity today University of Chicago Church Historian Jarislav Pelican responded "The greatest challenge facing the American Church today is boredom." Multitudes tag after Jesus. They're just multitudes, great crowds. I think we're having a revival of religion, do you? Why, yes didn't a recent Gallop pole show that seven out of ten American's say that they are very religious? Just as many people believe in God in the cynical 1980's, according to George Gallop, as said they believed in God in the more optimistic 1950's. We are very very religious. And yet today's Gospel demonstrates that the Bible is usually unconcerned about the great modern preoccupation is there a God? The infatuation of modern Atheism.

Rather the Bible's chief concern seems to be the much more interesting question, well what kind of God is there? For in the Bible it's always idolatry, that is the worship of a false God, which is more interesting than Atheism, the question, Is there a God? So let's use today's Gospel to ask a very biblical question: what kind of God have we got in Jesus? I mean the only way of knowing what we got is to listen to his words, to sit at his feet, to pay attention to his teachings, to listen to the stories that he tells. Attend to his word and what do we hear when we do that? The angels sang of peace at his birth in Bethlehem, but if you know the story you know that his birth brought not peace but a sword. The screams of mothers weeping for their slaughtered children over in Rama drowned out Mary's lullaby in Bethlehem. Old Simeon had sung to Mary when she brought baby Jesus to the temple to have him dedicated. He said that her baby would set in motion the fall and the rising of many in Israel. This Jesus was to cast down more people than he lifted up. From the beginning, from the very very very beginning, from his first sermon in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth he created division, this caster of fire upon the earth. John Venorsdall, President of Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia, was preaching from this very pulpit and he was preaching I think about the calling of the disciples. And about the calling of Andrew and how these brothers left their father, Zebedee, and they left the fishing nets and they went immediately and they followed Jesus. And John commented, just a little throw away remark in the sermon, Jesus broke the hearts of many a first century Judean family. Well, we hadn't thought about that. Its interesting the Gospel doesn't tell us what fisherman father Zebedee thought of his two boys trailing off after Jesus, leaving him with the fishing business, hitting the road as traveling Evangelists. And I tell you the whole congregation that day in Duke Chapel, of fathers and sons and daughters and mothers got real quiet. Do you think I've come to bring peace? No, I've come to divide. I've come to turn father against son, son against father, mother against daughter. I've come to provoke petty dictators to send their troops against your priests. To deport you, to provoke you, to beat you, jail you, mock you. In Jesus what kind of God have we got here? And the crowds, and the multitudes, got smaller. As he turned and walked his narrow way down toward Calvary. God, this real, demanding God that we've got in Jesus, is a God of truth. But we live in the midst of a world of lies. Do you think there's any way for him to bring peace to us until he first divides us, upsets us, inflames us, breaks us, liars that we are? C.S. Lewis said Christianity is a thing of unspeakable comfort, but it does not begin in comfort. It begins in despair and there's no use trying to get to the comfort by bypassing the despair. It's a dangerous thing to get mixed up with this Jesus. Not the Jesus of semi-vacationing preachers in late August, but this fire casting, division producing, Jesus of the Gospels. Do we really think he's come to bring peace? No, answer the father Nicholas Vancleef's of the world. No, answer Visminda and Levello Grand, Park Sang Yung, Neal McGill, Bishop Ding, and all those bright company, that crowd of martyrs, that stare down at us today from the chapel windows. Many of them holding in their hands the very instruments of their torture. No. His gospel is demanding, it's so demanding that it really expects, according to today's text, it really expects that we not, that we not only be willing to surrender and to suffer for its truth but that we be willing for those whom we love to suffer. Jesus broke the hearts of many a first century family. I mean imagine in a time of government persecution what an anguished decision it was for a Christian parent to seek baptism for the child. In fact, we believe that one of the reasons that infant baptism grew in the early church was that Christian parents were unwilling to die for the church during a persecution without first having their children baptized. Even though that baptism may entail the murder of their own children. Baptism was expensive then. And I think that nothing cuts against our liberal, modern, ethical sentimentality and religious superficiality than this. We have convinced ourselves in our society that there is some means of holding truthful convictions without

requiring the suffering of our friends and our families. And so we've tried to make love an individual emotion, which doesn't ask somebody else to suffer because we love them. But that makes nonsense of something like marriage, much less bearing children into the world. Because to love somebody always involves requiring that person to suffer because of our love and our commitments. Last year I was working on a book on clergy burnout. Why a lot of ministers burnout, or blackout, or brownout, or something. And I was struck in interviewing pastors, that one of the major causes of clergy resentment is that many clergy complain that it is unfair of the church to expect their children and their spouses to make sacrifices because of the pastor's vocation. Now to be sure many of those sacrifices and the demands that are placed upon clergy families are trivial and demeaning. A result of misunderstanding of what ministry's about, rather than out of vocation. But the church need not apologize when faithfulness to the gospel demands sacrifice, even from those who don't feel called to be preachers. And that has to do with all Christians. It really has to do with anyone who holds significant convictions about anything. As Martin Luther once commented, idolatry always involves a question of what you'd sacrifice your daughter for. Most of us will sacrifice our children to some god or another. So the question is not whether or not we will ask those whom we love to make sacrifices because of our commitments, but whether or not the sacrifices they make will be to a real god or just a false god. Last summer about this time, Millard Fuller, the founder of Habitat for Humanity, preached from this pulpit. And Millard Fuller talked about the night that he and his wife sat down and decided to trust God and sell everything they had accumulated and move to Americus Georgia and figure out what God wanted 'em to do next. Eventually God told 'em to go out and build houses for poor people and thus began Habitat for Humanity. Well, I was struck, though, after the sermon in the next week when people would talk about Millard Fuller they said does he have any children? It's okay for God to call somebody to move to a place like Americus Georgia, but to require sacrifice, to require suffering of people we love? Today's text implies that Jesus' has got no problem with people making sacrifices and expending their lives. Except when such sacrifice is to a false god. But our God is a real God. A big God, living God, who doesn't deal in trivialities. Our God is about big, serious business. Do we really think that this God has come among us in Jesus for something as boring as peace? Defined as we usually define it, namely the absence of conflict in our lives. When one looks at the altars upon which people are sacrificing their children today, altars of success, and popularity, and academic achievement, and security, and materialism, it's really odd that we should be shocked that Jesus dare ask for our children. Cause we could really sacrifice our children to lesser gods. We shall all give up our lives for something. Will it be for the truth or not? Oh the Jesus who disturbs our August tranquility this morning is a passionate God, who pushes us to our limits and asks us just what would you give your life for? Just what would you sacrifice your children for? For in truth we're all gonna die for something. And we're all gonna offer up our children on somebody's altar. Will the god whom we serve be true or false? A living, demanding, big, real God? Or only this pale, peaceful idol that we've created in our own image? That's a question out on the table this morning. And it's a big question for the dog days of August. C.S. Lewis described his conversion to Christianity, his own experience of relatively late in life, being surprised by God. For Lewis, his conversion to Jesus was not an all together pleasant experience. When he was embraced by Jesus, called to be a disciple, because he had spent many years in many different stratagems, attempting to avoid conversion. Lewis was smart enough to know, I mean he was a professor at Oxford after all, he was smart enough to know that is a potentially dangerous thing to get mixed up with this Jesus. And so Lewis wrote: "Amiable agnostics "talk cheerfully about man's search for God. "To me, as I then was, "they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat. Amen. (inspirational organ



drowns out other sounds)

- Almighty God, lift us up we beseech thee from ingratitude to thankfulness. We thank thee for the rain that sustains us, for work that engages us, for children that delight us, and for families that nurture us. Most of all, we bless thee for thy son Jesus Christ, our Lord who intercedes for us at thy right hand and who never gives up on us. This we pray, in the name of Jesus who taught us boldly to pray, 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, the power, and the glory forever. Amen. (inspirational organ music) (background noise drowns out other sounds)

- And now go forth in peace and be of good courage. Hold fast that which is good. Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the blessings of God, creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more. Amen. (inspirational organ music)