

- To be forgiven, our hopes to be renewed, our better selves to be quickened. Oh, thou in whom there's harmony, draws to thyself, and silence the discords of our lives. Give us all grace and strength to overcome every sin. Sins of resentment, deliberation, surprise, negligence, omission. Sins against thee, against our neighbor. Sins great, small, remembered, forgotten. Thou whose greatness is beyond our praise. Lift us up about littleness and our daily imperfections, send us visions of the love of that is in thee and of the good that may be in us, amen. And hear these words of assurance, of pardon, thus set the high and lofty one that inhabited the eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place with him, with her also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirits of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Therefore we have good courage. And now let us together offer on to God a prayer of thanksgiving using the Canticle number 6:2-7 at the back of the hymnal, which is entitled the Song of David. And let us pray it responsibly. Bless are thy oh, Lord, the God of Israel. (indistinct)

- Thy know Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. (indistinct)

- Thy is the kingdom, oh Lord. (indistinct)

- Both riches and honor come from the thy. (indistinct)

- In thy hand are power and might.

- In thy hand (indistinct).

- And now we thank thee, our God. (indistinct)

- Amen. (soft music) (indistinct)

- The word of scripture is found in Mark 8:31:36 and Hebrews 12:1-2. "And he began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed. And after three days rise again, and he said this plainly. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, but turning and seeing his disciples he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me Satan, for you are not on the side of God but of men." And he called to him, the multitude with his disciples and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, for whoever would save His life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" Therefore, since we are surrounded by soul greater cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let 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 before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Your end of the lessons. (soft music) (indistinct)

- The Lord be with you. (indistinct)

- Let us pray. At this Lenten season let us offer first the prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus. All mighty God, God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We give you thanks, for thy son. We remember in great gratitude. His goodness not to be ministered unto, but to minister, his sympathy with suffering of every kind, his bravery in face of his own suffering, his quietness of bearing so that when reviled, he reviled not again, his steadiness purpose in keeping to his appointed task. His simplicity, his inner discipline. His serenity of spirit, his complete reliance upon thee, his acceptance of the cruel cross. His deliverance from death, his ever present spirit. Thanks be to thee, oh God. Let us offer a prayer of intercession for all conditions of men. Loving and Holy Spirit of God, we pray that we and all men increasingly work together that thy will maybe done on earth. That the resources of the earth may be gathered, distributed and used with unselfish motives and scientific skill for the benefit of all. That beauty may be given to our towns and left to our countryside. That children may be finely bred and finely trained, that there may be open ways and peace and freedom for men to end of all the earth, that all men may learn goodwill through keeping thy company. And let us offer a prayer of supplication for ourselves using part of the words from the breastplate of Saint Patrick. May thy strength oh, God pilot us, may thy power oh, God preserve us. May thy wisdom oh, God protect us, may thy way, oh, God direct us. May thy shield, oh, God defend us. May thy (indistinct) oh, God guard us against the snares of evil and the temptations of the world. May Christ be with us, Christ before us, Christ in us, Christ over us. May thy salvation, oh Lord, God be all was ours, this day and forevermore. And let us offer a prayer of dedication. Our father God, by whom we live, and on whom our hopes are built, grant us ears to hear, eyes to see, wills to obey, hearts to love, then declared what thy will, reveal what thy will, command what thy will, demand what thy will. And let each one numbers answer, speak Lord for thy servant Peter. And now as our savior Christ taught us, we humbly pray together saying 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, amen.

- And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up. He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. How does one preach? What does one say? When unsure that listeners want to hear this message? Indeed, when he too would like to back away from it. with Kierkegaard, he might even propose, let us collect all the New Testaments that are in existence. Let us carry them out to an open place or up on a mountain. And then while we all kneel down and let someone address God in this fashion, take this book back again. We man, such as we are now are not good at dealing with a thing like this, it only makes us unhappy. For this is Passion Sunday in the Christian year. And its meaning has already been signaled by the scripture readings in which the early church interpreted Jesus steadfast setting of his face towards Jerusalem, and its imminent conflicts with religious and political establishment, and his crucial suffering and his call to his disciples, not to deter, but to follow him, in self-denying bearing of the cross. The writer to the Hebrews, reinforced this summons with a roll call of ancient heroes of the faith and focused it on the present. 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 before him endured the

cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of God. Then the invocation for Passion Sunday presumes our responding prayer, For bid, oh God, that we should forget amid our earthly comforts, the pains and mortal anguish that our Lord Jesus endured for our salvation. Grant us this day, a true vision of all that he suffered, his betrayal, his lonely agony, his false trial, he's mocking and scourging, the torture of the cross that remembering his sufferings and death, we may give ourselves holy to thee, through the same Jesus Christ, our only Lord and savior, amen. Are we really ready to pray that prayer? To enter into such a somber and demanding covenant? If this is what the New Testament demands of us, perhaps we all are on the point of saying, "Take this book back again, we men such as we are are not good at dealing with a thing like this, it only makes us unhappy." Here's the gospel, the good news, really bad news after all? Can we discover or have discovered to us another aspect of Jesus and his message that is good news, news in the sense of the unexpected. Good in the sense of making us joyful, happy, Robert Louis Stevenson in quite another mood than Kierkegaard, once remarked that he sometimes wished he had never read the New Testament so that he might come to it with a freshness that would make him conscious of its amazing significance and quality. Some of you recently experienced through that powerful film, "The Gospel of St. Matthew", what it meant to an Italian Marxist to encounter that strange book and be tellingly encountered engaged by Jesus. Indeed, some of our younger generation for whom our generation has diluted or domesticated or obscured that good news had begun to turn on to the ever surprising inviting winsome word and way and spirit of Jesus who offers and expresses new joy, gladness, freshness, freedom, spontaneity, authenticity of life. Does that turn you on? Let us recall for a moment, the personality and power reflected in the early church testimonies to its master and Lauren, insensitive New Testament scholar, John Knox, reviews the gospel stories and gathers for us the impression of a man of incomparable, moral insight, understanding and imagination. Of singular, moral purpose, and integrity of extraordinary moral courage and ardor, of intense devotion to duty, of joyous trust in God. A person of surpassing charm and winsomeness. Loved by many and loved intensely for the genuineness, completeness, depth and ardor of his humanity. With a warm sense of being a man of belonging to the world of participating in his life, he took life seriously, but not solidly. He enjoyed nature, children, human companionship. He saw life with fidelity, freshness and humor. He tended to erase the line that separated the sacred from the human, indeed extended the sacred to include all it was truly under centrally human. The other side of his lovableness John Knox goes on, was his own exceptional capacity for love, for warmth affection, deep enjoyment to fellowship with all sorts and conditions of man. A searching love for the lost, the sin, the weak, and indignant love against what hurt them. A forgiving love for those who persecuted and despitefully used him, says Knox. An harden person of singular, moral, purity and integrity, for whose love the whole world was too small. No wonder men loved him in return with supreme devotion. Of course, words even these words are never enough. It takes a personal encounter with his spirit in the New Testament and in the continuing church, in personal relationships now, even today. But these words ain't enough to suggest what he's turned us on down through the ages and in all the time. So in that grace and strength and truth, Jesus won the hearing and the following of stalwart men and weak, of developed scholars and the insightful and learned. Of devoted women and profligate one, of the burden, the poor, the aged, the children of all ages. The multitudes and the lonely individuals. He challenged them to fullness of life. Involve their strengths, enhance their selfhood, honor their freedom, redeem their weakness, forgive their failures. He taught not by coercive authority, but by appeal to their recognition, to the insights in their own experience, to their relationships with their fellow man and God at his world. He invited them to blessedness, freedom, joy and

devotion, and in so doing, he disclosed the eternal God who was manifest in his life and ministry and death. What is our response to such a joyful, liberating ministry? More positive than to the more somber demanding call of the steadfast Jesus facing the cross. This sermon title, the spontaneity and steadfastness of Jesus Christ enlisted from one of the younger generation and agreeing accent on spontaneity, but some reservation over imperative to steadfastness. Perhaps it is one of the perennial services of youth to free things up when their elders have anxiously closed down the very freedoms which our individualistic and hedonistic pleasure seeking Western culture exalts. You remember (indistinct) searching and classic exploration of this theme of freedom? In his story of Jesus before the grand inquisitor. The returning Jesus putting the dungeon at the grand inquisitor's order is encountered there and accused of not loving men enough because he expected too much of them, because when tempted in the wilderness by that dread spirit, he refused to coerce or manipulate man by miracle, mystery and authority, he honored their freedom too high, but the church had overcome his era and given the masses the control they needed. In recalling this classic story, I'm not commenting on that great church, which had one of its low points at the time of the inquisition. I'm rather thinking as you must be of the tendency and the human nature and human institutions to do the same, to abrogate freedom, to distrust it, to resort to rigid external control, moralistic pressures for conformity, mastery through dependence and other strategies of the fearful before their own, our own and others freedom, no wonder youth must overact at times, this process of liberation from throttling authority. Sometimes it must look to them as if a Christian is defined as one who wants to prevent others from having any fun. Yeah, true freedom, spontaneity, maybe as much in danger from the excesses of its devotees as from the restraints of the tired holsters, that picture of the grand inquisitor before Jesus and their discussion of freedom is not the whole story. Jesus could trust men's freedom, if more than just human nature was taken into account. If men could be one to rise above their individualistic self seeking to transformation of voltage, to a new kind of wanting, to a freedom in devotion to God and others, not self. Edwin Markham prophet for the social concerns and Christian faith my generation, left us this quatrain about Jesus. Why does he make our hearts so strangely still? Why stands he forced so stately and so tall, because he has no self to serve, no will that does not seek the welfare of the all. And Martin Luther summed up Christian freedom in two sentences, a Christian man is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. And this then one can hear Dietrich Bonhoeffer saying it for all time, Jesus is the man for others. The essence of his being and of our being and of the churches being, is being for others. So is the church, truly the church only when it is there for other. What this comes to is a bringing closer together, of those themes of spontaneity or freedom, and steadfastness or resolution, or a finding life in giving it. We've been talking in terms of abstractions largely, perhaps we can become a little more concrete by remembering at least one embodiment of this spirit and catching up the prayer that represented his spirit. 750 years ago, St. Francis of Assisi caught up in his life, the themes of our meditation this morning. The steadfastness and self-giving devotion of Jesus and of those who follow him, but the joy involve of the man for others and his discovery of true life. Caught up by the same text we read this morning, Francis gave up his comfortable circumstances and easy way for that remarkable investment of his life in the life of others, that is in shrine, not only in the great Franciscan order, but in this prayer. Oh Lord, our Christ may we have thy mind and thy spirit, make us instruments of thy peace, where there is hatred let us soul love, where there is injury, pardon, where there is discord, union. Where there is doubt, faith, where there is despair, hope, where there is darkness, light, where there is sadness, joy. Oh, divine master grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be

understood as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and is it in dying that we are born to eternal life, amen. So prayed St. Francis. Is it possible for us to pray that prayer? or is this one of those rare surfacings in the long history of the church, of that bullion spirit of Jesus Christ, seldom seen, little seen, little effective. If this were true, we would disparity, but would you let me refresh my spirit and perhaps yours by recalling some more recent instances than 750 years ago. And perhaps it's a good strategy to go some distance from Durham and think of people we cannot name. So I will call to instance, several people I met during a trip in Latin America. Here was the Roman Catholic Franciscan lay brother who joyously and sensitively wandered around the streets of the Nicaraguan Town and played with the youngsters and visited the aged, and bury the dead, and brought healing to the sick, and joy to those he met, a Christian brother. He was a retired but not so retired missionary nurse past 75, who 50 years ago was riding mule back over the mountains, up through eight and 9,000 feet to serve as a nurse, to people who had no other recourse in their illness, and no long past retirement and living in a kind of glorious sunset period of her life. She's tutoring little children and bathing and caring for aged people. And here was a young pastor, a (indistinct) India whose language I couldn't understand, but whose spirit I could not miss. As he graciously, encouragingly lovingly worked with youngsters and gathered boys around. As he preached and taught with sensitivity and genuine communication of a spirit that went beyond the words of the language I did not know. Or here was a postman from this country taking a month's accumulated vacation to fly down to a distant mission field, to spend his time and glad giving of service in building a new clinic for the hospital. And then here was a letter just this week from one of our students in a distance city who had discovered more than ever before the vitality, the power and the joy of a ministering Christian congregation, where all are a part of one another and of their Lord and the body of Christ is real in that community. Not only for the members of the body, but for those it serves. These are few among many possible instances of the flowering of that spirit in all time. And if you and I could search our hearts and know the spirit of those sitting next to us in the Pune, undoubtedly, you would find there too. Some yearning, some deep will to be like that, bound and limited, held back by our fearful and anxious resistances, tutored in the selfish ways of our world and our culture and having plenty of talent for inventing such ways even on tutoring, we nevertheless or somehow leave hold off by that spirit. Indeed, to test that fact, suppose we were to take this prayer of St. Francis read a moment ago and try revision, let us first try to revise it in terms of an egoistic pleasure seeking person. And so we begin, oh Lord our Christ, may we have thy mind and thy spirit, make us instruments of thy peace, where there is hatred, let us sow what? Sternness, rejection, control. Where there is injury, let us sow what? Squelching, put down, resistance. Where there is discord, what? Separation, alienation. Well, you see it doesn't work. We can't pray that prayer, in an egocentric way. Perhaps we could shift just a little and propose it with a subtler egoism. Where there is hatred, let us sow kind of understanding that credit's our ability to bring rapport. Where there is injury let us do something that will make people value our help. Where are there is discord, let us invite a reorientation toward us as centers of power. Where are there is doubt, let us give the word on our authority that doesn't work either, doesn't it? This subtler egoism to which we often retreat when afraid of its stark or brand is not what we wanted. Indeed do we not come back in our heart of hearts to the aspiration represented in this Passion Sunday theme of the steadfastness and the spontaneity of Jesus Christ, or to it's cropping out in this prayer Francis, let us again, pray. Oh Lord our Christ, may we have thy mind and thy spirit, make us instruments of thy peace. Where there is hatred let us sow love, where there is injury, pardon. Where there's discord, union. Where there is doubt, faith. Where

there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy, amen. (soft music)  
(indistinct) (soft music) (indistinct) (soft music)

- Oh God, father of all mercies receive this offering which we present to thee as part of our worship. May these gifts be the symbol of our consecration unto thee and to thy son, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. Now onto God's gracious, mercy and protection do I commit you, may the blessing of God come upon you abundantly, may he keep you strong and tranquil in the truth of his promises through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
(soft music) (bell dings) (soft music)