

Narrator: Sunday worship service, April 20th, 1980, Duke Chapel. (dramatic orchestral music) (dramatic orchestral music) (choir sings) (uptempo orchestral music) (congregation sings)

Speaker: Grace to you and peace from God the father and from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Let us confess our sins to the all forgiving God. You do not come oh God to judge us, but to seek those who are lost. To set free those who are imprisoned in guilt and fear. And to save us when our hearts accuse us. Take us as we are here with our sinful past in this world. Heal us and raise us up to the sake of your mercy and of Jesus, our savior. Did you not raise Christ from the dead? He lives with you and with us. For this world and for all ages. You are greater than our heart and greater than all our guilt. You are the creator of the new future for us. And a God of love forever and ever. Almighty God, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn to him. Have mercy on you. Pardon and deliver you from all your sins. Confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and bring you to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. Let us give thanks for God is good and God's love is everlasting. Thanks be to God, by who's love we have been made. Thanks be to God, by who's grace we have been made whole. Thanks be to God, by who's resurrection we are promised life everlasting. Amen. Tuesday evening at 8 p.m. in the York Chapel at the Divinity School, Margaret Walker Alexander, the well-known author of Jubilee, will read poetry from her book now being published, which is titled This is My Century. We invite all of you to attend. The annual Friends of Duke Chapel dinner will be held this Friday night with Professor Reynolds-Price, the distinguished author reading some of his writings. Members of the Friends and any of you who are interested are invited. Call the chapel to make your reservation. Our preacher for today is Dr. Harold F. Beck, minister and professor of Old Testament at Boston University's School of Theology and graduate school. We welcome Dr. Beck to the pulpit and look forward to the word that he will bring to us. Let us pray. Prepare our hearts, oh Lord, to accept your word. Silence in us any voice but your own. That hearing we may also obey your will. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. The Old Testament lesson is from the Psalms, Psalm 130. Out of the depths I cry to thee, oh Lord. Lord, hear my voice. Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, oh Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits. And in his word, I hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than the watchman for the morning, more than the watchman for the morning. Oh Israel, hope in the Lord. For with the Lord, there is steadfast love. And with him is plenteous redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. Here ends the reading from the Old Testament, Amen. (choir sings)

Speaker: Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the Gospel lesson? The Gospel lesson is from Luke chapter one, verses 49 through 55. For he, who's mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy. As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever. (congregation sings)

Dr. Beck: It is my pleasure to join with you, your ministers and these angelic musicians in this service of praise and worship. I'm particularly aware of the musicians, whose presence at this point in term indicates not only the beauty of their art but the wisdom of their priorities. I invite your attention to the subject, the story of the three wise women. We all know the story of the three wise men. We're not at all sure where they came from, isn't quite clear what they did when they got there. We have no idea where they went when they left. And it wasn't until they became immensely popular in the sixth century that Rome obliged and gave us names for them. But every parish in Christendom has at least three bathrobes and so we know the story of the three wise men. Would you turn with me to Luke, chapters one and two and hear the marvelous story of the three wise women? Who in many ways are the mothers of the church. The first of them is Elizabeth, the wife of a priest in Jerusalem. Tradition says she was trained in Levitical learning, skilled in Aramaic and Hebrew. Knew how to read the text, the kind of woman to whom a pregnant, unmarried cousin would go to spend the first trimester of her difficulty. Everybody needs a cousin like that. Unto Elizabeth was given the incredible privilege of saying for the first time, Ave Maria. Hail Mary, full of grace. Blessed are thou among women and blessed the fruit of thy womb Jesus. To Elizabeth, our mother was given the gift of expectation. The second wise woman is Mary, a country girl. A friend of mine who's a rabbi said when she was told she was to have a child without benefit of marriage, Mary might well have said oy vey, enough is enough already, but she didn't. My soul doth magnify the Lord and my heart rejoices in God, my savior. To my mother Mary was given the gift of obedience. I have a third mother, a wise woman. I'm not sure I'd want her in my congregation. Saint Luke says she was married for seven years and widowed for 84. She lived in the temple, which means she probably was a pest. Her name was Anna. And when they brought Jesus to Jerusalem, says Saint Luke, she took one look and headed out. And went around town saying, what you've been waiting for has begun to happen. To my mother Anna was given the gift of witness. And if you take expectation and obedience and witness and ball them all together, you get what is becoming rapidly one of the most beautiful words in the English language. And that is the word creative hope. I speak of this subject in a time when we who have been a very clever society, very smart, technologically, way out ahead are suddenly beginning to discover whether or not cleverness and technological skill are going to get us through Afghanistan, Iran, Colombia. Oh please, I am not wanting to be anti-intellectual in a place like this. How would a Bostonian dare do that? Love the story of Bishop Shamel of Louisiana who tells of a college sophomore who got a summer job in a grocery store which he knew nothing about. The first day, a lady came in and said, I'd like half a grapefruit. And the young man said to her, we don't sell halves of grapefruit. And she said, that's all I can use and that's what I'll have. The young man went to the back of the store to appeal to the manager and said, there's a nut out here who wants a half a grapefruit. All of a sudden, he realized the woman had followed him to the back of the store. And with remarkable recovery he said, and this gracious lady is willing to buy the other half. (crowd laughs) After the woman left, the young, the manager called the young man back and said, I'm impressed, who are you? And the young man said, I'm a college sophomore, summer vacation. I come from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the home of ugly women and great hockey teams. And the manager said, my wife is from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. (crowd laughs) And the young man said, and what hockey team did she play on? (crowd laughs) Oh, cleverness is a lot of fun. But what does cleverness say to a society for whom in many respects, the future has suddenly become a burden. What does cleverness say to Paul Valery's poetic statement, the great fact of our time is that the future isn't what it used to be. What does cleverness say to a world in which the urgent steals all the time from the

important? In which even clever people are hunting for easy answers and restless with informed resolutions. That's the kind of a world to which I think my three wise mothers bring their message of hope. Not a world in which Jean-Paul Sartre cries out, no exit and is offered the Nobel Prize for saying so. But a world which believes in the god of the exodus. The hopes of my three wise women were fulfilled. For there was soon one to come in whom that hope became incarnated. And he was to say, the spirit of the Lord is upon me. He's anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to release the captive, give sight to the blind, set free the oppressed. And to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Salvation can come in a context of hope. And I would like to suggest that those beautiful words of Jesus are not so much a call to a vocation which is optional but to an anthropology which is essential. Let me repeat that cause it was a little thick. Jesus' words are not a call to a vocation which is optional but to an anthropology which is essential. And I think he says four things and that's what I want to say. It seems to me the first thing Jesus said is, speak good news to the poor. Be capable of making judgements in your time. I don't think for a moment that Jesus of Nazareth ever said judge not lest ye be judged. For to live is to make judgments. I think what Jesus said is don't be judgmental. Or you'll get it right back in your face. The good news to the poor is the word that is judgment, that is critical of the conditions that make and keep them poor. The good news to the poor is speaking the truth in love at a point when they won't make it if you don't. I spent 11 years of my life in the Middle East. Love the story of the old Bedouin sheik who got lost out in the desert one night, wet and rainy and cold. Finally found his way back to the tent, came in. Discovered all he had was an old pot of dates and a candle. Lit the candle, reached for a date, held it up to the candle, discovered the date was wormy, flipped it out of the flap of the tent. Reached for a second date, held it up to the candle, discovered it was wormy, flipped it out of the flap of the tent. Blew out the candle and ate the rest of the dates. (crowd laughs) There's a temptation to that, isn't there? But essential to our anthropology, essential to hope is whether or not, there is a breed of people who will speak out the words of judgment. Not in order to put people down but because people won't get up if someone doesn't speak the truth in love. I was invited to a lecture at Harvard. They called it a lecture on poetry but they made music. They get mixed up like that over there, every now and again. The lecturer was Leonard Berenstein, it was two o'clock in the afternoon, which is an indefensible time for a lecture. He had brought along an audio visual aid, which was the Boston Symphony and that helped. (crowd laughs) But in his puckish way, he leaned out across the podium, and he said, God never said let there be light, he sang it. And quick as a wink I knew exactly the melody to which God sang that refrain. The first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. (speaker sings) And a good refrain, refrain coupled with that kind of music, I got news for you. God didn't sing that just once, God song that melody every time he created one of you. Let there be light, let there be light, let there be light. (speaker sings) Are you there? God is the most incorrigible humanist the world has ever seen. Believes in human beings and realizes that God's own very hopes depend on the ability of a breed of people to believe in a world that hasn't yet come. What kind of people are we going to be in the wake of our Easter faith? I trust we will be people who will make judgments. That's what our three mothers were hoping would happen. I got a second point, are you still there? In this essential anthropology, Jesus says, the deed had better become a liberating action. I am currently very angry at a great deal of radio and television evangelism. They come on and you know, they try to scare you to death by telling you the world is coming to an imminent end. I don't know how they know. Of course, there's always time to send in a contribution notwithstanding that imminent end. (crowd laughs) But my real anger is they're always asking the wrong question. The first question of biblical religion is not are you saved. Don't get nervous, I care very much about that. (speaker laughs) But

the first question of biblical religion is could God possibly save, use you for saving somebody else. The first question of biblical religion is not are you good but what are you good for. Release the captive, give sight to the blind. Santayana once defined a fanatic as somebody who, having forgotten his purpose, redoubled his effort. Wouldn't want to be that kind of univocal Christian, would you? The deed that brings liberation so centrally important. Incidentally, one of the interesting facts of our time is this, that when we do not do the deeds that bring the liberation, we are beginning to discover that our victims always become our judges. And those who we crucify we have to ask to be our saviors. We're learning that the weapons of the weak are very strong. Let me repeat that because it's one of the important facts of the 20th century. Your victims always become your judges and those who you crucify, those who you will not liberate, you have to ask to be your saviors. How much does God care? How much does God hope? For when God wished to be completely divine, God became wondrously human. I was lecturing at the University of Winnipeg, a student said, can we go to lunch? I said, why not? He said, may we go by the post office on the way? I said, why not? When we got there, he said, do you want to go in with me? And I said, what for? He said I'm going to mail an American parishioner back to the United States. I said, where is he? He said, in the brown box on the back seat. The big question for the clergyman was can you send an American parishioner home without paying duty on him? Clergy asked really big questions just before lunch. We asked the man behind the counter in the Canadian post office and he said, you won't have to pay duty if you write three words on the box. By now, I was all ears. Said what are the three words? He said, no commercial value. And all the way through lunch, I said to myself, wouldn't it be great if we could write on people's foreheads when they're alive what its convenient to write on their little boxes when they're dead. No commercial value. Ultimately precious, hope means that we begin to liberate by the deed that begins to become flesh. And that I think is important. A few years ago, the American Guild of Organists met in Boston. They sent in 1,300 reservations and 2,700 came. No wonder they came, Boston Symphony Orchestra, The Boys Choir from King's College at Cambridge, and at the console, E. Power Biggs. Isn't that a marvelous name for a musician? E. Power Biggs, he should've been an Episcopal bishop. (crowd laughs) Two days before the first of two recitals, Professor Biggs broke his right arm. He didn't tell anybody but Mrs. Biggie. And the night before, the night of the first of two recitals, he went to Symphony Hall said to Arthur Fiedler, I don't want my colleagues to see me, turn the console around. An hour before the concert, he slid in under the console, sat quietly and at 8:30 lifted his broken arm onto the console and played magnificently. Went home, came back Friday night, an hour early, 8:30, lifted his arm onto the console, played his last public recital. The next day, they took him to hospital. A few weeks later, he died. But everybody who knows anything about E. Power Biggs knows two things. Number one, he loved his music. Number two, he loved his fellow musicians. That kind of investment that liberates people, I think to be important. So the hope of our mothers, which got realized in the son of one of them, was that there should rise up a breed of people who would become beautiful. Let there be light. Who would not only speak the word of judgment and do the lead deed of liberation but I got to say something else. The promise that brings hope proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord. Theologians have argued about that for centuries and I've got the answer. How's that for arrogance? (crowd laughs) I'll tell you what the acceptable year of the Lord is, it's this year. It's right now. Now is the time when it behooves faithful, hopeful people to say, you can stand on the promises of God. Now is the time to say, they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. When you think it's going to be? Now is the time to say there's a rainbow beyond the storm. Now is the time to say all things work together for good to those who love God. For 20 years teaching in seminary, I have said to unnumbered classes of students, if I ever had a chance to tell the

bishops, last summer, I had to address 40 of them and now my students are saying snidely, what did you say? I want to tell you what I said. In a moment of unguarded enthusiasm I said to 40 bishops of the Methodist church, What do you think your mother thought when she was washing your diapers? (crowd laughs) Now I acknowledge that there's a number of bishops who never wore diapers. (crowd laughs) I call them the immaculate exceptions. (crowd laughs) What do you think your mother and father thought when you were a helpless scout? I thought he would come to a better end? I'm sure. (speaker laughs) (crowd laughs) But sure and don't you know that one of the reasons you're here is that somebody dreamed dreams of what you could be. Wrote poems and did dances and sang songs so we'd make it through the week. This is the acceptable year of the Lord. It's right now. How beautifully my pastor put it the other day and may I give you this as a gift. We do not know what the future holds but we know who holds the future. That's it. You can stand on the promises of God. And the world is waiting to hear that kind of hope, especially from Christians. And when we have that quality of hope, which is tested by reality, we shall be free. A few years ago they brought the old, still living alumnus of my school back. They brought in the chaplain and in an unguarded moment somebody said to him, would you like to speak to the students? And horror of horrors, he said yes. He was 96. And I said to myself, he's going to be even longer than I am. They draped him over the pulpit. (crowd laughs) And I will never forget what he said. He said I want to thank my alma mater for setting me free without setting me adrift. And he sat down. And I thought that was simply marvelous. I want to be able to thank the church for setting me free without setting me adrift. And I think that happens if I speak good news to the poor. If the deed becomes word in me and if I have that sense that you can stand on the promises of God. But I have a fourth thing to say and it seems to me this is a marvelous place to say it. And that is, my three mothers said, have style. If you didn't hear that, I'm gonna spell it. S-T-Y-L-E, style. Think about that, would you? When all is said and done, if you're drab as a church mouse, some kind of ecclesiastical, grim sour-puss, the world doesn't want you around. We're the heirs to dance and to music and to friendship and to gesture and to architecture. What a tragedy if we didn't have style. I have it on the authority that great Roman Catholic biblical scholar, Maurice Chevalier, that style is alright. How beautifully he said it. A hat is not a hat until it's tilted. A rose is not a rose if it's wilted. This is almost biblical you know. A rose is not a rose if it's wilted. A song is not a song until you sing it. A bell is not a bell until you ring it. Love was not put into your heart to stay. Love was put into your heart to give away. Of course that man we adore had style. The little children came to him, the common people heard him gladly. The crowds had to be torn away. That's style. I've got to run down but please, God wants to sing that refrain, let there be light. God wants us to be beautiful. That's why Saint Ahanasius said of Jesus, he became like us in order that we could become like him. A couple grace notes if you please. Next time around, I want to be Italian. And I'd like to be Giuseppe Verdi it's much more interesting than Joe Green. And I would like to write a little opera. Verdi lived in my land during a great part of his life. He hated organ grinders. When he met one, he'd buy the organ. When he died, they found 300 in his basement. (crowd laughs) One day, Verdi went down the street to lunch. He came up behind an organ grinder, dirty, wrinkled. The monkey was scabby and worst of all, he was playing the tune very badly. Verdi tapped him on the shoulder and said, pick it up, pick it up. Three weeks later, Verdi came down the same street behind the same organ grinder all spiffed up. Creases fore and aft, even the monkey had had a bath. And best of all, he was playing the tune right up to time. Verdi thought to congratulate the man. Went around in front to speak to him, discovered the organ grinder had a band in his hat on which were the following words, master musician, student of Verdi. (crowd laughs) That's all it takes. Let us be good students. God doesn't want weaklings. God wants strong women and men and children who

can be bent to God's will by our shared hopes. So that even if God makes very heavy demands, as he did against our blessed mothers, they will be there and a source of hope. One of my Presbyterian students sent me a parable and I stop, if you've heard it that's alright, good parables a little hard to come by these days. Three trees growing on a hill side, quiet, conversation. The first tree said, if I ever get cut down I want to be made into a baby's cradle, that's what I want to do. The second tree said, if I ever get cut down I want to be an ocean liner, carrying jewels and people. That's what I want to do. The third tree finally squeaked up and said, I don't want to be cut down. I just want to point men and women to God. The wood cutters came and they took the first tree and they said, a cow's stall. And the tree remonstrated but they made it into a cow's stall and sold it to an inn keeper in Bethlehem. And a family came and one day it became a baby's cradle. And the first tree said that was even better than I ever dreamed of. And they cut down the second tree and said, a fishing boat. And he remonstrated and, and they said, no, we'll make you into a fishing boat. Sold it to a fisherman on an inland sea and it became a very great pulpit. And the second tree was heard to say, this is better than I dreamed of. And then they walked towards the third tree and they said the Romans are paying big prices for crosses these days. And that was the cross on which Jesus was crucified. And that tree has been pointing men and women and children to Heaven and hope for 1,900 years. The spirit of the Lord is upon us. Let us be beautiful. Let us pray. Eternal spirit like the air so high above us, we cannot comprehend thee. Like the air so deep within us, we cannot live without thee. Perform in our hearts a Copernican Revolution, until you become the center of our universe, the heart of our desires, the desire of our hearts and the hope of the world. Amen. (congregation sings)

Speaker: We have heard the word proclaimed. Now, let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God, who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the spirit. We trust God, who calls us to be the church, to celebrate life and its fullness. To love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone, thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

Crowd: And with your spirit.

Speaker: Let us pray. Because we did not make ourselves, because we cannot care for ourselves, because we cannot forgive ourselves, our hearts and souls reach out to you, oh Lord, our God. We thank you, oh God for our creation, our preservation and our redemption. For hills to climb, for burdens to carry, for temptations to resist and for fears to overcome. We thank you, oh God for all that keeps us believing. That our years indeed have meaning. That a knowing, caring hand is upon our lives. That the reckless sound and fury of the nations is not the final word. That love endures when tongues have ceased and prophecies have failed. We thank you, oh God for ages past and for ages yet to come. For the wisdom scripture, the means of grace, the bonds of faith and hope that springs from the eternal and fills our hearts. Oh God, on this significant day in the life of Duke University and Duke Medical Center, we offer words of thanks and of supplication. We give thanks for those whose vision, ingenuity, creativity and labors have brought the dream of a new facility for caring to its reality. For those who have sacrificed time and energy and thought, to bring healing and life to others. Bless oh God all those who have labored. Bless too, oh Lord all those work and all those who will continue to work in your healing ministry in that place. Doctors and janitors,

secretaries and nurses, maids and technicians. For the relief of pain and suffering and for making broken lives whole, we ask your blessing oh Lord. Lord, our God, Lord of all peoples and of all places, send down your spirit upon all of those persons who are caught in the painful web of hopelessness in Iran. Comfort oh God and sustain those who are held hostage. Bless and support their loved ones and their families. Warm the hearts and direct the thoughts of the militants and the leaders of that nation and of ours. That reason and understanding and goodwill might prevail. We do not want war or bloodshed or strife, oh God. So through your love and grace and wisdom, bring healing and harmony to troubled spirits and to this troubled land. Oh Lord, bless those in this university who this week finished classes for this term. May wisdom and knowledge increase. We pray that you will calm troubled spirits, ease worried minds. And all that has been learned might be revealed in papers and exams and testing. For sound learning, new insight and renewed hope, oh God, we give you thanks. This oh Lord we have heard your word, now let us believe. As we believe, let us be obedience, as we obey let us serve, as we serve let us love. In the name and spirit of our Lord, even Jesus the Christ we pray. Hear these words and hear us now, oh Lord as we pray together as our Lord has taught us. Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be they 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. (dramatic orchestral music) (choir sings) (dramatic orchestral music) (congregation sings)

Speaker: Oh Lord, our God, we offer praise, we lift our hearts, we give our gifts. As we give praise and thanks and gifts, oh Lord, help us to give our lives and thus oh living God receive all that we have and are and use them to serve in your holy name. As we commit ourselves to be your living, loving church in this place and on this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (dramatic orchestral music) (congregation sings)

Speaker: Now without bowing heads or closing eyes, may I, as one Christian to another offer you this blessing from our Lord. The grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be with you and with those whom you love. This day and forever. (choir sings) (uptempo orchestral music)