

- Testing one, two, three, four. Testing one, two, three, four. (organ music)

- When we gather to praise God, we remember that we are his people who have preferred our wills to His. Accepting his power to become new persons in Christ, let us confess our sin before God and one another. Oh, God of grace and truth, whom the heavens cannot contain, but who love us to dwell with those of a contrived heart, look mercifully upon us as we seek thy face. Thou are eternal and we are frail children of the dust, thou art holy and we are filled with pettiness, thy heart is love, and we seek our own, thy thoughts are not our thoughts, and thy ways are not our ways, yet mean though we are, we are not holy so. We are tired of our obsession with self. Show us the way of finding thee and finding our brothers, and finding ourselves more truly in the worship of thee and service to our fellows. We are sick of the injustice and cruelty of which the whole world groans. We hear the cries of the oppressed and remember the desperate anxiety of those who face another winter without employment, victims of the world's greed. Give us wisdom and grace to establish justice between men. We are sick of our own pettiness, our preoccupation with little things, little jealousies of those who possess excellencies and advantages beyond our own. Little arrogancies and pride over underserved fortunes which are ours. Help us as we worship thee, to come to a truer knowledge of ourselves, for knowing thine eyes to be upon us. May we seek thee more diligently for knowing ourselves and our need of thee. God be merciful to us, for we are sinners, amen. Hear the words of assurance. Oh, Lord God of hosts, blessed is the person who puts his trust in you! You have forgiven the offenses of us all and have taken away our sins, you have put away all your displeasure, and now show loving kindness, amen. Let us pray together, the Lord's prayer. 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 and ever, amen. (gentle instrumental music) ♪ Shall we gather by the river ♪ ♪ Where bright angel feet have trod ♪ ♪ With its crystal tide forever ♪ ♪ Flowing by the throne of God ♪ ♪ Yes, we'll gather by the river ♪ ♪ The beautiful, the beautiful river ♪ ♪ Gather with the saints at the river ♪ ♪ That flows by the throne of God ♪ ♪ Soon we'll reach the shining river ♪ ♪ Soon our pilgrimage will cease ♪ ♪ Soon our happy hearts will quiver ♪ ♪ With the melody of peace ♪ ♪ Yes, we'll gather by the river ♪ ♪ The beautiful, the beautiful river ♪ ♪ Gather with the saints at the river ♪ ♪ That flows by the throne of God ♪ ♪ That flows by the throne of God ♪

- Let's join together in the unison collect. Oh, God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, grant that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright. Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations, through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. The scripture lesson this morning is taken from John 18:28-40. "They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas "to the Praetorium. "It was now morning. "They did not go to the Praetorium themselves "or they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover. "So Pilate came outside to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this man?" They replied, "If he were not a criminal, "we should not be handing him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves, "and try him by your own law."

"The Jews answered, "We are not allowed to put a man to death." "This was to fulfill the words "Jesus had spoken indicating the way He was going to die. "So Pilate went back to the Praetorium "and asked Jesus to come to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked. "Jesus replied, "Do you ask this of your own accord "or have other spoken to you about me?" "Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? "It is your own people, "and the chief priests who have handed you over to me, "what have you done?" "Jesus replied, "Mine is not a kingdom of this world. "If my kingdom were of this world, "my men would have fought "to prevent my being surrender to the Jews. "But my kingdom is not of this kind." "So you are a king then?" said Pilate. "It is you who say it." answered Jesus. "Yes, I am a king. "I was born for this. "I came into the world for this, "to bear witness to the truth "and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice." "Truth?" said Pilate, "What is that?" "And with that, he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no case against him. "But according to accustom of yours, "I should release one prisoner at the Passover. "Would you like me then to release the king of the Jews?" "At this they shouted, "Not this man," "they said, "But Barabbas." "Barabbas was a bandit." Thus endeth the reading of the scripture. (liturgical music) Let's repeat the unison affirmation of faith. We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come and in true man, Jesus, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust him, He calls us to be in his church to celebrate His presence, 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.

- And also with you.

- Let us pray. Almighty and most glorious God, we your most unworthy people give your most humble and hearty thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness to us, and to all people. Our blessings go forth to you for our creation, preservation and all the wonder of life, the means of grace and the glory of hope, but above all for your incredible and overwhelming love for each others. We praise you our God for our friend, the sun, who is our day and who brings us the light, who is fair and radiant with a very great splendor. We praise you for our friend the moon and for the stars, which are clear and lovely through our sky. We praise you for the wind, the air and clouds, the calms and the storms, for the water who is very serviceable to us and humble and precious and chaste for the earth and its creatures, we praise you most of all, for the earth sustains us and all of its creatures and grows fruit and flowers of many colors for all of these wonders we Lord and glorify you, our God. Our prayers of intercession. We pray most fervently for all people everywhere who have to make war, heal the madness of the nations, comfort the broken hearted, bind up the wounds of the sick and bring peace to the spirits of the dying, teach all of us the ways of making peace instead of the ways of making aggression and commit us to the actualization of peace in our times. We pray for all people who suffer from oppression and competition. We earnestly long for a world where some people do not relegate other people to the poverty and misery of the underdog and for a world where no one has to lose. Be with us God, as we go about creating a better society for all people. We pray for our friends and loved ones, as well as for the people we do not know who suffer the pain of sickness, be one with our healers, dear God, so that wherever possible people may be restored to health. Most sincerely we pray for ourselves, that each and every one of us may come to know and love ourselves, for each of us is beautiful and precious but we are hard pressed to believe this. Instill in us the desire to take ourselves seriously and finally be with us so that all living will be wonder and all wonder, living. This is our prayer, oh God, our creator and sustainer,

amen. We are pleased to welcome as our preacher for this morning, the Reverend Dr. Wallace Halston, the pastor of the Durham First Presbyterian Church.

- Everyone has heard quite enough of the Watergate thing, I'm sure. And yet it raises such ultimate questions for our lives, individually and as a people, that we must guard against the temptation to get free of it too soon. At least not until in Jacob like passion we have ran from it a blessing. Is there a God to whom it matters what we do? Is there a kingdom of justice and of goodness and of truth, that stands, these are the our poor kingdom? Is there another option to expediency and to the pragmatism of what works, to the operative and the inoperative syndrome? Which seems to justify at least to our former attorney general a politics of deceit. Is there ultimately a context in which the little text of our broken lives find some redeeming hope? These are at least some of the questions that our current national crisis raises for me. Now, the problem is that we are not accustomed to using the words king and kingdom anymore. Ours as an age of self-consciousness and self-expression and self-fulfillment. The men sciences so-called have left their mark on us all. The words, king and kingdom smack of totalitarianism in an age when we are struggling to be free. And perhaps history demands that it be so. The charter of freedom has been won at bitter costs from King John through the Puritan and the Victorian kingdoms we struggled. And now even for the powers of this age. And yet I say to you on the rebound from Kings and kingdoms, we may be tempted to deify individual and social freedom to such a degree that each person to use Rudyard Kipling's words dubs his dreary brethren, king. That is to say if every person is his or her own judge and every nation its own judge, then Demagoguery of one sort or another is just around the corner. And Demagoguery is only another cruel king by another name. If Watergate teaches us anything at all perhaps it is that freedom without standards soon becomes chaos. Now the word's standard by the way is derived through the French word for banner. A banner we fly above ourselves to show a higher loyalty. The banner of God perhaps that waves above every person's life to save freedom from chaos. And so the words, king and kingdom though they may be oppressive and finely evil when applied to human being. Or the promise of life when applied to God. Which brings us to the bottom. Where in fact some of the same issues are rock. Now as for our texts, the jealous Jesus and Pilate affair, it records a drama so prodigious and so cornier that one might well wonder if it could possibly have happened in so perfect way, and the answer of course is, we don't know. The fourth gospel does not pretend to tell us what happened as though it were some literal biography of Jesus of Nazareth. What is truth anyway? It's not facticity certainly. Any decent historian knows that. Truth lived on many levels, and perhaps its deepest level is the level of meaning and the kind of meaning that shapes behavior. And so John in the light of Jesus tries to tell us the truth not about what happened, but about what always happens. When God takes human shape in the world. There is Pilate viewing Jesus as people of power always view pure goodness with both admiration and content. Then there is Jesus representing precisely that paradox of which we are speaking this morning namely, a majesty clean beyond Pilate comprehension and a weakness in the face of power. In precisely that domain in which he was called king. Pilate's concern says the drama was not religious at all, it was as political as it could be. How much of a threat to his power did this man represent? That was the issue. Because you see the chief priests had been speaking out of both sides of their mouth before the Jewish court they had stressed the religious implications of Messiahship when they had called him blasphemer. And now before the Roman court it was off the political implications of Messiahship that they spoke and they called him a traitor. Which is to say that when God takes human shape in the world, both the church and the state go for the judges, and that's the truth. Are you just a

harmless dreamer or do you threaten my power to rule? That was the issue. Art thou king? Art thou? Is the question, the centers of power, be they individuals or nations always ask. When they are confronted by the kingdom not of this world, enemy or friend. Art thou king? Only the answer he gave is not easy for us now to fathom. For it has about it as many dimensions as Jesus had in himself. Note, for example, that the question of power quickly ended up in the question of truth and is that too not always so? Question of power run headlong into the question of truth. Which is proof enough that Jesus plied, not the shallow lakes of our lives but that he moved on the mighty water. Now the answer of Jesus was misunderstood by Pilate and it is often misunderstood by us. "My kingdom," said Jesus, "is not of this world." I mean obviously Pilate thought that he meant that he was interested not in this life but in the next life. And therefore that Jesus made no disrupting claims on the Roman rule and so Pilate could sit back and relax. If Christ and his church are not concerned with racism and deceit in government and bombing in Cambodia and something so painfully concrete as the struggle for decent public education in the City of Durham. But then you see the Kings and kingdoms of this world have no real fear, do they? Well isn't religion after all just an innocuous vaguer? To fill cathedrals such as this. An opiate for a weak and affluent people prompting them to dream of heaven even though many around them live hell. Giving them hopes for the future that will enable them to endure the present without too great revolution, isn't it? There was recently an article in the New South Magazine that made the point that the role of religion in the poor white community of Cabbagetown in Atlanta, Georgia, was not as we so often think it to be, to offer a realm of escape from the world and it's misery, said the article, rather religion in that community function to socialize the poor in the dominant values of their deprived society. And in that I say to you it did more to forestall social change than Karl Marx ever even begin to imagine. The theological justification of slavery in the 19th century. And the unwillingness of the church in the South to work for the undoing of that blasphemy in the twenties. The civil religion of the court profits and the White House religious services mixing prophecy with patriotism in such a way. As to define ourselves on God's side, and with few exceptions he on ours in the West. Bible you see as a prodigious book because it tells us the truth about what happens when God and the kingdoms of this world collide. And if we assure Pilate that Christ's kingdom is not of this world perhaps he will say to us as he did then to Jesus. "Well, I find no fault in him." Is that really what Jesus had in mind or the author of our text? I say no. And my guess is that the future of freedom itself depends on our deeper wisdom. I would suggest to you as alternative number one, that Jesus whatever he might have been doing was at least implying a simple matter of fact. When he said, "My kingdom is not of this world." There have been times, I suppose, when people have been tempted to think that this is the best of all possible worlds. And then with each generation and with a little better education, each go we progressed to a higher and more humane form of civilization. But few in our century would venture that Pollyannaism. Not after two World Wars, the Koreas, the Vietnams, the assassination, the politics of deceit. To say nothing of the shallowness of life that meets us in the machinations and the morals of modern man. We know full well you and I that the kingdom has not come, and that whatever there is to God in Christ it must be more than can be seen in this world or else it is of no earthly good. Believe the Watergate by if further proof is needed that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, look at ourselves, the kingdom has not come in you and me either. It hasn't. We condemn the widespread evils of lying and cheating abroad in our land without ever pausing to consider our own complicity in these things. No generation has ever been fruitier than our generation in tracing the social lives. But perhaps no generation has been more reluctant than ours either to cry as we did in our prayer of confession, God be merciful to me. The sinner. Psychologist remind us that denunciation is often a transfer.

That is to say we tried to shift the blame onto our neighbors in order to avoid the pain of confession in ourselves. Communism has often then made a scapegoat in this land. And it is, I suppose, a case in point. That communism is completely of this world. And that communism is without any ultimate light to shed on our human condition. That for me at least is clear. But we shall never really cope with its challenge until we ask after the whens and the why. The First World War gave it a start, and the Second World War helped it to spread because communism thrives more on human misery than it does on some economics philosophy. And so the partial answer to the whens and the why, is that comfortable people such as you and I have not greatly cared that millions of other people live in misery in our world or at least we do not seem to use the power we have to turn our nation's face and its pocketbook to the alleviation of that misery. Thus you see the issue is back on our doorstep again. And we trust that God's kingdom is something more than we see in this world. And that is the reason we pray, thy kingdom come. Only we must surely know that such a prayer is asking God to conduct a major surgical operation on the vital organs of our lives. And anyway, at least by implication the answer Jesus gave told the truth, didn't it? My kingdom is not of this world and because of that we hope and we pray, let it be, let it be. And yet on the other side of that story, there is the presence of Jesus himself, a word says John in the flesh. As if to say in some strange way, the kingdom not of this world is yet in this world. If we had not known something of its nature present in our midst could we ever have progressed so far as to pray, thy kingdom come? Jesus called it a kingdom of truth, truth. And that in itself might be our clue to finding the kingdom, not of this world resident and active here where we live. "I was born for this," said he, "to bear witness to the truth, "and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice." The New Yorker magazine which is to my mind one of the finest theological journals in the land, commented not very long ago on the Watergate affair in terms of the force of sheer truth. And perhaps this is the blessing which must be wrong in Jacob like fashion from the Watergate before we let it go. The power of sheer truth in the world. What finally broke the case said the New Yorker, was the force of sheer truth in a system that is as helpless to deny the truth as it is to deny public opinion when public opinion has been around. In the last few months, it read, we have seen the power of truth acting almost in spite of our public mood, turn our political life upside down. And in fact the public, it said, was dragged from willful ignorance, by the truth, In Hannah Arendt's words, "Truth has a despotic character." Men who could wipe countries off the face of the earth or blow us all to extinction, were powerless. If Martha Mitchell reached for the phone, one word of truth, the article, ends outweighs the whole world. The kingdom of not of this world, He said, breaking in to the kingdoms we have contrived, unable to be stopped even by the public mood, waving the banner of God if you will over the parapets of our lives, to save freedom from chaos. "I was born for this," said Jesus, "To bear witness to the truth, "and all who are on the side of truth, "listen to my voice." To which Pilates sneered a sneer that always comes from people of power in this world when the kingdom not of this world stakes out its claim. Truth? What is that? Now John's gospel makes a great deal of truth and of light, as the meaning of Jesus Christ for us today. And by proof, John does not mean a theory or a theorem rather he means an event, something that happens that gives meaning to all other events, to everything else that happens. By shining a light on them, that enables us to see them, as they really are. "Jesus", says John, "is that event "that illumines all other events. "By showing us who we are in the light of "who it is we are meant to be." "I was born for that," said Jesus, "to bear witness to the truth. And with His birth, in relation to which both believer and unbeliever alike now date their male. We are given to see the kingdom not of this earth breaking in upon our lives, in judgment and in hope. Once in a public park in Jacksonville, Florida, a spectator to a chess game was overheard to say of a certain move on the chess board, "That's it, that's it."

And he meant of course that though the other contestant might score him for a while, even for a long while. That one move had determined the outcome of the whole game. The opponent might not know the victorious input of that move. And the other spectators might not know it either, but that one spectator knew, and now he watched the whole chess game before him in a different light because he knew how it was going to end. That's it. Now the Bible plays the role of that perceptive man. By faith, and faith in the Bible is the respond to the person, to the beckoning, not the bludgeoning, but the beckoning of the mystery, the response to the person to the grasp for the kingdom not of this world. The Bible looks at the total Christ event and says, "Behold the man." That's it. God has made his move in human story. And that moves give meaning to all other moves that will be made. Shines light on all other events that will be done and now at last we see things as they really are. "I was born for this," said Jesus, "to bear witness to the truth "and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice." Notice not the other way around as conservative Christian orthodoxy would have it. That those who listen to his voice are on the side of truth. That is to say those who go to the right church or say the right creed, not what John said. "All who do the truth," say that He, "of whatever creed or of whatever kingdom "march to the drumbeat of the kingdom not of this world. "And all who are on the side of truth "are in the process of listening," says grief to my voice. A deep calls unto deep in this text and we haven't even exhausted it. We've only waved at it. Now what a bit for us, we, you and I who must know live with partial justice and partial goodness and partial truth even in the time being. W. H. Auden and the concluding part of his Christmas oratorical for the time being set it well enough for us all. Speaking of Jesus, He wrote, He is the way. Follow Him to land of unlikeness, you will see rare beasts send to have unique adventure. He is the truth. Seek Him in the kingdom of anxiety. You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years. He is the light. Love him in the world of the flesh and at your marriage. All it's occasion, shall dance for joy. In the name of the father, and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, amen. (organ music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, amen ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Aa, aa, amen ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hosanna ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (organ music) (singing in foreign language)

- Heavenly father, giver of all good things, who has taught us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. We dedicate these our offerings to the service of the church. Humbly beseeching thee that all our gifts and energies may be consecrated to the extension of thy kingdom on earth, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. (organ music) (bell rings) (instrumental music) (indistinct chatter)

- Thank you everyone. You're welcome. (indistinct chatter)