

(liturgical music)

- We have something to celebrate. God lives, God loves. We are here to say it and to be it to one another, the Lord be with you. Let us pray. The most merciful Lord. We are those who have not wished anything to happen. Many years, we have lived quietly succeeding and avoiding notice living and partly living there have been oppression and lust after power. There have been poverty and affluence. There have been petty discrimination and major injustice. Yet we have gone on living and partly living. We do not wish anything to happen, but now a great fear has come upon us. We are afraid in a fear, which is hard to know, which is difficult to face, which none fully understands. We are not clean. We cannot remove that which has dirtied us not we alone nor the house nor the city, but the whole world is unclean. Our lives are unreal, unreal, and disappointing. The prize is given the essays written, the grades and degrees bestowed, the sympathy shared all has become less real passing into unreality. The end of time has indeed come upon us. It is finished. We admit that this is our life. We call upon thy promise, Oh Lord, to return to those who confess, to create a new clean hearts within us, break through our walls of unreality, bring wholeness to our partial living. Bring hope to our finished lives, bring love and justice to comfort our great fear. We now indeed have something to celebrate. where there is death like that of Martin Luther king, like that of rioting men, there is life of non-violent students and of hardworking negotiators. Where there is mistrust and separation both within our university and beyond, there are now signs of common purpose and action toward full humanity for all men. Where there are words about love and services of worship, there are now bodies on the line and acts of praise and joy. Lord, we receive this new world, this new creation and in response to what we have heard and seen and to what we know ourselves to be. We began a new, we offer ourselves to thee and to the world, which is thy known. Grant us therefore a tenaciousness that will not let go until the final battle closes and a nonchalance that the final battle does not depend on us. These are our prayers in the name of him who gave his life for us and who still lives. Even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (liturgical music)

- The reading is from gospel. According to John chapter 17 and chapter 19, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come, glorify thy son that the son may glorify thee for thou has made him sovereign over all mankind, to give eternal life to all whom thou has given him. This is eternal life to no thee who alone are truly God and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent. I have glorified thee on earth by completing the work which thou gave me to do. And now father glorify me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world began, I have made thy name known to the man whom thou give me out of the world. They were dying. Thou give them to me. And they have obeyed thy command now that they know that all thy gifts have come to me from thee. For I have taught them all that I learned from thee, and they have received it. They know with certainty that I came from thee they have had faith to believe that thou send me And from chapter 12 now is the hour of judgment for this world. Now shall the prince of this world be judged and driven out. And I should draw all men to myself. When I am lifted up from the earth. This he said to indicate the kind of death he was to die. Let us pray. Assist us mercifully with your spirit, Lord God of our salvation, that we may approach his reverence to the meditation of those mighty acts whereby you have

given us a new life and the victory through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen. The saying upon which we are to meditate this hour are the words, the gospel, according to Saint John attributes to Jesus, as his last, prior to his death, they are usually translated as it is finished, but this loses the richness of its meaning in the original text, which one might rather translate as it's done or the task has been accomplished. This is the context Jesus is crucified. He commences his mother to his disciple, John. And then the gospel says, Jesus knew that everything had been completed after expressing his thirst, He says, it's done. Then he bows his head. And in the words of the gospel gave up his breath or rather passed on the spirit. This interpretation fits well with what the gospel of John as Jesus say before the crucifixion, the words which are read before. Jesus task was to glorify God among men to reveal God's glory and love to men. This he did throughout his life. He's becoming a humble servant by his mighty signs and as a climax by his faithfulness unto death, the terrible suffering and death of Jesus was a stumbling block to the disciples at first, they were quite convinced that this is the end, that this is the ultimate defeat of their hopes. And so they went back to their old lives. They went fishing, but it turned out that this was not the end, but rather the beginning of a new life manifested in the resurrection and in the new type of community, which Jesus giving of himself and his victory over death created. When the gospel says that Jesus gave up his breath, there's a double meaning to it. It not only means that he literally gave up his life, but also that he passed his spirit of his life on to his disciples, that he gave them the life giving and transforming regenerating spirit, which had animated him throughout his life. This the disciples, sweat realize only in retrospect, of course. The cross, the gallows of the ancient world has become the symbol of the Christian faith. This is very strange when you consider that it was the gallows and that it did stand for death and a terrible death. The cross is a sign of the paradoxical nature of the gospel. Namely that out of death comes life a new life. Not out of every death, of course, this is not a general truism, but an affirmation that out of a life, given in service and faithfulness to death, God brings out a new life. A new life not only for the person who died because God raises him from the dead, but also a new life for those, for whom he died. And for whom the death becomes the Supreme witness of his faithfulness to God and his cause thus it is that a death can have the seed of life in it that it becomes the making of the victory. As Jesus says, in the same gospel, a grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies. But if it dies, it bears a rich harvest. It was said of the early Christian martyrs that their blood was the seed of the church, the courage and radiance with which these early Christians met their death was a weakness, which is what the word martyrdom really means. A witness to others and a witness so powerful that it changed the minds and lives of thousands of onlookers in the Roman circus and the Roman stadiums where the Christians were tortured and killed. These martyrs died in a way that people hadn't seen before. They were in an ecstatic rapture because they felt united to their Lord in his suffering and his victory. Once the cross became the chief symbol of the Christian faith, and this took a while, it cease to be a realistic naturalistic type of cross. It was a trophy of victory. And when the figure of Jesus was added to it, it was the figure of the reigning Christ, not the agonizing Christ, the Christ with his arms outstretched to embrace all mankind with his head high and with a crown on it. These early crucifixes well expressed the experience of Christians throughout the first 1200 years of Christendom. Namely, that that man on the cross scored a victory that the vanquished conquered the old hymns about the cross and crucifixion, some of which had been sung here today, in this service express the same mystery that Jesus agony and death was a victorious battle with the forces of evil and of death. That Christ reigns from the tree as they put it Easter and Good Friday are inseparable. One is contained in the other and the early Christians had only one unitive holy day, to celebrate both. The mystery of Christ battle and victory has been reenacted many times in the lives of his

followers. In our days, the names of the German fighter against Nazi-ism Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the name of Martin Luther king come immediately to our minds, of course. There's a medieval verse which Martin Luther then expanded into a full-scale hymn and back into a Cantata called Christ lay in death, dark prison, a Cantata, which will be performed here tonight, which expresses what I'm after with wounds, which are better than my own. It was a strange and dreadful site when life and death contended, the victory remained with life. The reign of death is ended. Amen. Let us pray, Make alive with your spirit, this your family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contended to be betrayed and given up into the hands of wicked men and to suffer death upon the cross for he now lives and reigns at your right-hand Father until the power of evil is overcome for his sake. Amen. (liturgical music) (foot steps)

- It is not easy to love son often when you think you love, it is only yourself that you love and you spoil everything, you shatter everything. To love is to meet oneself and to meet oneself, one must be willing to leave oneself and go towards others to love is to commune and it could be commune, one must forget oneself for another one must die to self live completely for another to love hurts, you know, my son for since the fall, listen, carefully son to love is to crucify self for another. Let us pray. Oh God. Now that the shadow of the cross falls across the season, deliver us from the smug assumptions, which hide the eternal depths of mystery from us. If life has been smoothed out for us and it's tragic pain ignored if the great hunger passover is needed and sound and the petty rituals of self-satisfaction, he felt lives had been the raft of the powers in love, which you have shown through the cross, then make plain the deceit and arrogance of such lies, help us in this hour to deeply consider our lives repenting of our sinful carelessness and insensitivity in the midst of this world's pain. Forgive us for the times when we have seen those whom the injustices of the world have bruised and beaten and has passed by on the other side, when we have built around ourselves the walls of privilege within which we might hear the passion of exploded men, the weeping women, and the bitter cry of children robbed of happy youth. When we have seen our nation at war, but have denied our complicity and the resulting death and destruction, fill us now with hunger and thirst for justice, that we may bear glad tidings to the poor. Set at Liberty, all those who are in the prison house of want and sin and be instruments of that peace in our nation, and throughout the world. Open our eyes to the side of your mercy, that through such a vision, we may act in love with undoubtedly faith. Amen. (liturgical music)

- And it was about the sixth hour. And there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour and the sun was dark. And in the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, father into thy hands, I commend my spirit and having said those, he gave up the ghost. Now, when the Centurion saw what was done, he glorified God saying, certainly this was a righteous man. Father, into they hands, I commend my spirit. How strong in death are the habits of a lifetime Jesus died precisely as he had lived this seventh word from the cross, uttered in the very moment of death was totally consistent with Jesus life. This commitment to God was, but the renewal of a commitment, which dated back to the time when the boy, Jesus barely old enough to walk with his family to Jerusalem, acted out and expressed his life's highest priority. Being about the business of his heavenly father. Every writer or speaker on the subject of this seventh word, expresses the thought in one way or another, that as we live so shall we die. Dr. Cleland reminds us that where a person's treasure is there will his heart be also and suggest that the last words of all of us will likely be in line with the tenor of our lives. Dr. Clovis Chapo tells of a man who made himself famous in the restaurant business. He established restaurants all the way across the continent.

When at last, he reached the end of his earthly journey, those nearest to him gathered about his bed to hear his final words, when they bent over him to catch his last whisper, it was this, slice the ham thin. There is humor in that little story. There is pathos, there is a deep and abiding truth. How strong in death, are the habits of a lifetime. It seems to me then that the message from the cross is not so much a lesson in dying as a lesson in living. Christian dying is, but the continuation of full dimensioned Christian living. Father into thy hands, I commend my spirit, this last word from the cross leads us to consider what is to me the most important question facing the Christian Church today. If Christian dying, is but the continuation of Christian living, then what is that? What is the Christian life? Most will say on this and other campuses that the jest the essence of Christian living is service to mankind. But that simply leads to a second question. This is an age in which all men are concerned, or many men are concerned about service to mankind. It is an age of rampant, secular humanitarianism. People are literally falling all over one another to be of service, to bring about racial equality, to bring about social justice, and not just Christians, in fact, regrettably, it sometimes seems that Christians lag behind some non-Christians in showing active concern. What then is Christian living? What sets it apart from secular humanitarianism? First Christian living involves a personal relationship with God, as well as a serving relationship to our neighbors, the secular humanitarians compared with the true Christians and they are few enough are going through life, one legged. Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit. These last words of Jesus were a quotation from the scriptures from the 31st psalm he added, but one word to the phrase from the Psalm father, and thus his last utterance from the cross became not only a scriptural quotation, but a prayer as well. It is popular to picture Christ in these days, exclusively as the teacher healer, servant of his fellow men. But let us in fairness, remember that he was a devotional man. He had his 40 days of fasting alone with God in the wilderness. He had his Gethsemane when human companionship was sufficient, neither to sustain Christian life nor to help him face Christian death, a dimension of Christian life, a whole dimension of Christian life shared with followers of other religions, but totally missing from the life of the secular man is fellowship with God. Prayer life, devotional life. A continual cultivation of the awareness that this is our father's world. And that even in the midst of suffering and injustice and indifference and profanity, his purpose somehow is at work. But if the secular humanitarians are going through life one legged. So are countless thousands of people who call themselves Christians, but think of the Christian life solely in terms of prayer, Bible reading, public worship and personal piety. Full dimensioned, Christian living only begins with man's awareness of God and his acceptance of God's grace. It doesn't end there. Man's only proper response to the grace of God is a life of love and service to his neighbors. How can anyone read the new Testament and miss that message? And we teach it in our Sunday schools, but too often deny it by complacent work a day, living. The true Christian cultivates his personal relationship with his heavenly father, but by both word and action, heeds Christ's admonition that we love our neighbor. And how do we love our neighbor? The parable of the good Samaritan is Christ's answer, the Samaritan did not respond to his neighbor's need by deploring the violent deed that had brought him bloody and torn into the ditch. He did not respond to his neighbor's need by speaking words of comfort, and by assuring his neighbor that he would remember him in his prayers. He responded by stopping to bind the wounds of the fallen victim. He took him to a place where he could find medical care and food. And from his own pocket, he took money to defray the cost of this care. How do we distinguish the Christian life from secular humanitarianism? I have said first that the Christian has a dimension wholly missing from the secular life, his relationship with God. Second now, and for these last few minutes, I submit that there are qualities in the Christian's relationship with his neighbor, which properly should and do distinguish the

Christian life from the lives of many secular do gooders. First, let me remind you of Ford motor company's popular television commercials, all of which end with the word Ford flashed across the screen, the O formed by the light bulb. The bulb is turned on as the narrator says, Ford has a better idea. Well, I say that Christianity has a better idea. Ask all those who are giving their lives in the service of mankind, why, why are they doing it? See if anyone can come up with a better reason than the Christian reason of all the men who have devoted their lives to the civil rights movement who had a better idea than Martin Luther king Jr. Who's every acts, who's every utterance bespoke his belief that all men are children of God, all men, are children of God, all men are brothers. The Christian concept of mankind is in fact such a powerful idea that frankly, I have trouble believing a man who lives in our society, who gives his life in service to mankind and then tells me that Christianity has nothing to do with it. I simply find it hard to believe. From time to time, we act in behalf of our neighbors for all kinds of reasons, some pretty good, some pretty bad, some indifferent. Sometimes we help others because it is good politics. And thank heavens, it is becoming better and better politics to be interested in the service of mankind. Sometimes we act because the government or foundations give us money to encourage our research and other efforts in behalf of human rights, social justice. Sometimes we act out of fear and coercion. Do we ever act for a better reason than for the reason that we see our neighbor as our brother? So the Christians reason for acting is unique. Second, when the Christian seeks to serve his fellow men by overcoming evil and injustice, he employs quite distinctive tactics. He resists the temptation to return evil for evil, to do so, to return evil for evil is very human, but it is not Christian. The Christian seeks to overcome evil with good, as Paul puts it in his letter to the Romans. His weapon is not the mailed fist of force and violence, but the pierced hand of the cross. His rallying cry is not burn baby burn, but come let us walk in Christian brotherhood. His answer to white racism is not black racism or even such euphemisms for that as black power or black awareness, it is human awareness, human brotherhood. The Christian takes no pride in being a white man, no pride in being a black man immense pride in being a man and the great sin of American civilization over hundreds of years of slavery and segregation is not that American civilization has stamped out pride in being a black man, it is that we have stamped out pride in being a man, a human, a creature of God. It is fashionable in some circles to ridicule such sentiments as I have expressed as too moderate for our day also outmoded, worn out, I submit that the Christian tactic of overcoming evil with good is not moderate, but revolutionary, not outmoded, but only now coming into full power. And it works, oh, how it works. It sweeps right over white and black demagoguery, stealthy snipers, thoughtless looters, and burners. Overall, the forces that seek to divide our people and brings together at the funeral of a great Christian leader, black people and white people united by honest sorrow and by honest hope for a better tomorrow. The story is told of a city away under the Southern cross, which undertook to beautify itself by the construction of an artificial river. A winding channel was dug through the city and connected with an abundant supply of water. And the people rejoiced in the new loveliness of their town. But one day a troublesome water weed appeared in the bed of the stream and flourished to such an extent that the little stream became quite choked. Not even a canoe could pass up or down its surface. And the people were troubled. All kinds of tools were brought in to hack out at the roots of the weeds, but it didn't work. Poisonous chemicals were employed in an effort to eradicate them, but to no avail. One day a genius made a new suggestion, leave the weeds alone. He said, and plant Willow trees on the bank of the stream. The scheme was tried and lo the roots of the Willow trees devoured the substance on which the weeds had been flourishing. The weeds died away of their own accord. And now the drooping and graceful willows and part, a fresh loveliness to the stream. Good can overcome evil. The

Christian life is worth living. The shadow of Calvary's cross lies over Bethlehem's manger. These things, life and death cannot be separated. As we live, so shall we die. Christ is our exemplar in life and death. If Jesus had first committed his life to his heavenly father at the moment of death, he would have had no more impact on this world than those two thieves who died one on either side. But Jesus commended his spirit in to the hands of God from the beginning. Throughout his life, he lived a devotional life, carefully cultivating his relationship with God. He lived a life of selfless service to his fellow men serving them equally of high and lower state loving them because they were children of God. And his lifelong battle with evil, his sole weapon was good. As he lived, so he died. Father into the hands, I commend my spirit. May we pray. Blessed father, these are troubled times. Look through the triteness of that expression into the honest bewilderment of our hearts and minds. We see that human resources do not cope well with the great problems of our day. We must in life as in death, commend our spirits individually and collectively into thy hands. Give us, we pray the assurance of the personal presence in our lives. The all consuming desire to serve mankind and the courage and the revolutionary spirit to wage our war on evil with personal positive, constructive goodness, practical righteousness, the positive remedy of superior character, superior actions, superior institutions. Amen.

- Go forth in peace to the world. Be of good cheer. Hold fast to that, which is good render to no man evil for evil strengthen the faint hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted, honor all men. Love and serve the Lord rejoicing in the power of the holy spirit and the blessings of God almighty the father, the son, and the holy ghost be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen. (liturgical music)