

- That man might see beyond this human agony and might know the meaning of suffering by being obedient unto death. Oh Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sakes just undergo want and shame and pain. We confess most humbly that we have refused to share the burden of thy cross, that we have denied thee, rather than face mockery and have sought comfort and security. We confess that we have no cross to lay down because we have never taken up thy cross. As we open now our hearts to the agony of God, we acknowledge that not until we share the bitter cry of all men and Earth's pain and hell can thy Holy Spirit within us dwell and bring the kingdom to reign. For be it, oh God, that we should forget amid our earthly comforts, the pains and mortal anguish that our Lord Jesus Christ endured for our salvation. Grant us this day a true vision of all that he suffered in his betrayal, his lonely agony, his faults trial, his mocking and scourging and the torture of death upon the cross. We know that though, he were a son yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. And so God may we join in his prayer of obedience, not my will be done, but thy will. In this way, let us join Christ on the cross, suffering him and in his spirit, for we have the assurance of the promise of Easter, the ultimate triumph over death, which gives meaning to suffering and obedience. As thou has given that itself utterly for us, may we give ourselves entirely to the. Oh Jesus Christ, our only Lord and savior. Amen. ("Behold and See If There be Any Sorrow") ♪ Behold and see ♪ ♪ Behold and see ♪ ♪ If there be any sorrow ♪ ♪ Like unto his sorrow ♪ ♪ Behold and see ♪ ♪ If there be any sorrow ♪ ♪ Like unto his sorrow ♪ ♪ Behold and see ♪ ♪ If there be any sorrow ♪ ♪ Like unto his sorrow ♪

- The scripture letters for this meditation is from the gospel according to John, the 19th chapter verses 28 and 29. Here are the words of the apostle John, how he writes of Christ on the cross, the fifth word. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, "I thirst." A bowl a vinegar, stood there. So they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. Or hear the words of Matthew, where he says, "And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, "filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed "and gave it to him to drink." I thirst. From the biblical text of John, these two words of deep physical and spiritual significance come down from the cross. One feels that they were said softly and painfully and could be heard only by those close at hand. John standing nearby with Mary, the mother, so recently charged with her future care by his Lord, heard and later recorded this fifth statement. Why John chose to record this plea is a matter of some conjecture. Perhaps as an eye witness, he merely felt obliged to state as accurately as he could remember every detail of this tragic event. For we have seen from the accounts of all of the writers that they did not all remember the same details. Perhaps his nearness to the cross made him the only recorder to actually hear this compulsive human plea forced from the lips of the son of man. Whatever the case, one finds the words, "I thirst," to be very understandable in relation to the physical agony of crucifixion and far more meaningful later to the population of Jerusalem and to those who first heard the gospel story from the lips of the apostles and the disciples. Surely it seems creditable that a very literal interpretation may be accepted. This longest of days had been a physical burden too heavy for the human body to sustain. Discounting the mental and the spiritual anguish of the day, one remembers the long sleepless hours of the pre crucifixion trials and the sleepless night in the Garden of Gethsemane. One recalls too, that following his base and unreasoned conviction, Jesus had been turned over to Roman soldiers for

the harsh treatment accorded the condemned criminal. These were common soldiers, foreigners in Jerusalem, conquerors of a pagan and anti Roman territory, military police in an insurrectionist province. And their prisoner had been condemned by the high priests as a revolutionary provocateur, and characterized by the Jews as a traitorous self-styled king of Israel. Why indeed, should they treat him differently? Was he not just another prisoner under the sentence of death? And so they made sport of him and mocked him. Some buffoon rigged up a crown of hurtful thorns. Others scourged him, according to the custom of that day. Then followed the procession to Calvary. The routine called for the condemned prisoner to carry the cross on which he was to be hung. Already, the physical stamina of Jesus had been taxed to the breaking point. And so the Cyrenean, Simon had to be pressed into service. During the bodily pain of being affixed to the cross, Jesus had been offered, in charity, a mixture of wine and gall. This too was the custom of that day. Apparently it was a pain reliever of sorts in liquid form, but because it clouded the mind, as well as deaden the pain, Jesus refused this tiny measure of physical relief. And with his refusal, the crucifixion procedure was completed. In the light of these physical debilitating events, it would seem reasonable to accept the thirst of the body as a conscious physical need, based upon dehydration, nor did the darkened sky or the tumultuous upheaval of nature bring with them a single drop of rain. No surcease had been granted or accepted up to this particular point. And so Jesus said, "I thirst," and one near at hand quickly soaked a sponge in vinegar and placed it on a reed and held it to the lips of the man on the cross, a kindly gesture in response to a physical need by an unknown, unidentified bystander. But those who later heard the gospel story, or read the records of the witnesses to the crucifixion, found these simple words, full of significance. They brought to them a sympathetic understanding far removed in place and time from where we stand today. It is highly improbable that anyone at this service has ever known real physical thirst. Of course, we have been thirsty, even very thirsty at times. Certain illnesses do involve dehydration. There are medications which dry our mouths. There are experiences in our lives or in the lives of many when quenching the thirst was not possible, even for several hours. But the people of the Eastern Mediterranean in 30 AD knew real thirst personally. An inadequate water supply was a rather standard seasonal problem dictated by the Mediterranean subtropical climate, with its long, dry season. Available water was not only of questionable purity, it was often brackish. The salt compounds dissolve from the limestone karst of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains could spoil a well or a stream or a river. It had ever been thus. Beginning in pastoralism, did not Father Abraham except the dry hill country and give Lot the watered plains? Had not Isaac wandered among the hills reopening one well, after another, only to be pushed out? Had not the great Moses himself been brought to the very edge of Perdition when he smoked the rock for water in the Sinai wilderness? The captured cities of Canaan were prizes by virtue of the existence of the wells and the streams, which determined the sites of their founding. David, the shepherd boy made king, wrote his sweetest poems to embrace this rare and much sought element. "He leadeth me beside the still waters," he wrote, or again, as the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after the oh God. Yes, indeed. These ancients had known and lived with thirst. Any description of Palestine as a Roman province indicates that in this respect of accessible water, no great improvement had been made down through the centuries. Towns were larger and more villages had been established, but the local well was the focal point of social life. Still dipped from wells and carried in earthen jars, the same water was used and reused. It was a part of the everyday mind of the everyday people. As Jesus ministered to the countryside from Galilee to Jerusalem, he stopped at these gathering places to quench his thirst and to minister to the people. Who can forget the Sumerian woman at the well or that Jesus spoke to her or the waters of life a

metaphor, which she knew, but would struggle to understand. To the supposedly curative powers of the pools of the cities is where Jesus went to find human bodies hoping for miraculous healing. Again and again, the roads from north to south, which Jesus trod, are described as dusty. The washing of the feet of guests who had traveled along the way was a standard courtesy in this day. John the Baptist, dweller on the fringe and well versed in the knowledge of the semi-arid hills, took water as the symbol of the power of spiritual cleansing. The famed Jordan river, where John performed, flowed slowly and shallowly during the dry season. Few, if any, who witnessed the crucifixion were not aware of common thirst. And the response to the plea from the cross, "I thirst," brought an instantaneous, almost automatic response from one nearby. He did not ask permission from the Roman guards. Rather, moved spontaneously to this human charity. Only the chief mockers dissented. But for those who did not hear the words from the lips of Jesus, but listen to, or read them later, their knowledge of Christ's thirst caused their consciences to rise in human sympathy and their souls to yearn for the quenching waters of life. They recall the many references which the Lord had made to this common commodity and how he had given it symbolical meaning. In the sermon on the Mount, he had said, "Blessed is he who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, "for they shall be satisfied." Attesting to a basic tenant for the aspiring Christian, which later became a proven refreshment to the souls of men. The apostle John quotes Jesus as saying, "I am the bread of life. "He who comes to me shall not hunger. "And he who believes in me shall never thirst." Even during that last week on earth, the Lord Jesus had said to his disciples, "Come, oh, blessed of my father. "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you "from the foundation of the world. "For I was thirsty and you gave me drink." So the later disciples, and the even later converts to the new churches, came to understand the words of the dying Christ. Knowing physical thirst from their own experience, they moved on to cultivate a spiritual thirst for the waters of life. Men found no weakness in the plea from the cross. Rather, they found a bond of kinship with a son of God who in human form was subject to the same debilitating human stresses to which their own bodies were subject. But more importantly, they would understand and soon develop a sympathetic thirst for the spiritual insights of a new world order. The quoted words of Christ would become a sustaining fountain, which downs through the years is proven to be a reservoir of such clarity and depth that man can neither escape their life giving truth, nor can they exhaust their wealth of meaning. The gospel is available to all. It is threatened by no drought. It does not inundate the mind nor drown the spirit. Rather it is like an ever flowing spring, which nourishes the body, invigorates the mind and nurtures the spirit. On the cross, Jesus' thirst for the waters of the earth in the gospel message, the savior thirst for us. Let us pray. Merciful and ever present God, creator and sustainer of finite bodies and infinite spirits, we seek thee, in this hour, as we commemorate on this day and in this service, events, which drift irrevocably into the dimness of the historical past. We are reawakened to a contemplation of words and deeds by which we are made free to drink at the fountain of living water. Blessed is the gift of thy son and sterile is the soul of him who shuns thy gift. Lord Jesus, son of God and son of man, hear our prayer. In thee, do we find the still waters to assuage our sorrows, quiet our anxieties, and silence our doubts. No problem or pain or privation is ours to which thou has not been subjected. Grant to us a steadfastness of mind, a strength of spirit and a courage of conviction, which will transform us from covetous predators into humble servants. Holy Spirit, gift of our Lord, to all who call upon his name, be present in this assembly, cleanse with the pure waters of the spirit, the sins which stain the past, and quench the flames of doubt and rebellion which afflict us. Be thou the strong voice of conscience, be thou the advocate of our prayers, be thou the wise counselor to our parched and thirsty souls. In Jesus' name, amen. (organ music) (congregation sings)

- Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, mighty and merciful Father, how exquisitely has thou loved this world. To send thine only begotten son on such a strange journey to save the world and us with it. And we stand in sheer amazement and utter awe that thou has done this, not only without our help, but yes, even in spite of our resistance and defiance. Thy persistence, oh God, has been our salvation. We are lost, but thou has shown us. Indeed thou dost show us that thou can do what we cannot do. And thus we lay before thee the burden of our failures. We have been blatantly accusing when we should have been gentle and accepting. We have been falsely accepting and silent when it was the time for courageous words and acts. We have been eager to blame our world and blindly oblivious to our own faults. We have been so complacent and the heavenly vision has faded into the light of common day. We have lived as though Christ never died or broke the bonds of death. We come now in despair of ever healing our own moons to seek thy loving kindness. Receive us, we pray, despite our stubbornness, cleanse us and give us a new heart, keep us from the shabbiness of our complaints, deepen our gratitude and teach us to live among our brothers with gladsome love. At this moment, the world has need of thee. The hands and minds and spirits of men are wrestling with matters that can be brought to completion only by thee. And in the assurance that thou can do this, we bring before thee the sick and the weary, the poor and the distressed, those who have lost their way. Be thou and remain the God of salvation above and amidst the perplexities and frustrations of human adventures and current events. Tell and show to all people that no one is lost to thy sight but that no one can escape thee either. Make thyself known everywhere as the Lord of the pious and of the godless, of the wise and of fools. Be thou the Lord of our poor churches, whatever denomination. The Lord of the righteous and the unrighteous governments, of the well fed and of the underfed nation. The Lord of those who feel called on today to write so many good things and a great many, not so good things. Be thou, the Lord of those who want to teach, but are not willing to be students, and those who want to be students, but are not willing to be taught. Come now and be thou our protector in whom we may trust. As we pray in the name of Christ in whom thou hast eternally called and loved us. Amen. (organ music) (woman singing)

- When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. "Glorify thy son, that thy son may glorify thee "since thou has given him power over all flesh "to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. And this is eternal life that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work, which thou gavest me to do. And now Father, glorify thou me and I own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made. I have manifested thy name to the men whom now gavest me out of the world. Thine, they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is fallen from thee. For I have given them the words, which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I come from thee, and they have believed that thou did send me. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. As we contemplate these last words of Christ, as we see him nailed to a crude wooden cross in the agonies of death at Golgotha, between two thieves, what are we to think of this man called Jesus? He is about to die. His life and his work are at an end. For better or worse, it is finished. What are we to think? Let's be objective. Consider the facts of this man. The record shows that he was born in Bethlehem, in a stable, the son of a humble Nazareth carpenter. All that is now known of his life was recorded after he died. He was a teacher and a preacher, but mostly to humble folk. He held no office. He acquired no property or wealth. He was

loved by a few, but unknown to most people of his time. And he was sentenced to die at the age of only 33 years, by the good people of Jerusalem as a common criminal. This is hardly an Horatio Alger success story. And we would not be surprised to find the record of his life and death disappear from view like a feeble scratch in the wet sand when erased by the surf. Yes, by most reasonable standards of material and secular success, Jesus would be labeled a failure. But how wrong would be this judgment? For we have here this afternoon, nearly 2000 years later, along with millions, the world, over, a meeting of Christian churches to commemorate this tragic, but somehow glorious event. It is finished? Hardly. Jesus' death was but the beginning of his teaching and influence. I think it is a meaningful commentary on the common values of our society that the greatest man whoever lived is this man, Jesus, who possessed so few of the attributes of popular success. I would like to talk about the meaning of his life in terms of his role as a teacher. This is not out of place in a university, such as ours, where we consider our mission to be that of teaching and seeking the truth. The world has never known a greater teacher than Jesus. He, first of all, loved his students and he talked to them in their own idiom. He was a master at the apt story and the appropriate parable. But most of all, he taught by his supreme example. On the shores of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew and James and John, and said to them, "Follow me, "and I will make you fishers of men." And with these and the other of his disciples, he showed them the truth of life and the way to God by what he did even more than by what he said. But how we may ask, should we follow Jesus? And where? Does he ask us to follow him in his humble life as a poor man? Does he ask us to rock the boat, to be a troublemaker, to die on a cross? I would say the answer is, yes. A qualified yes, perhaps, but definitely, yes. Jesus' life was not easy. The tasks he set for himself were not simple. His path led to the cross. He likewise offers to us, not ease, not success in the conventional sense, not wealth, not fame, but hard work and the sharing of misery and pain, and yes, eventually death. But for a cause, for a meaningful life that will allow us to say with Jesus, when our Calvary arrives, "It is finished." Perhaps the most inescapably forceful message of Jesus' life is his death and the way of death. We call him God, but he died as all men must. The one inescapable unchangeable fact of life is this inevitability of its end, a physical death. We cannot choose whether or not to die. We cannot choose when to die. We can however, choose what to live for and what to die for. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of our time for so many of us is that we have nothing we are willing to die for. And therefore, in a real sense, there is nothing really worthwhile to live for. But Jesus says to each of us, "Ask, and it will be given you. "Seek, and you will find. "Knock, and it will be open to you. He invites us to follow me. Can we really do this in 1965, Durham USA? We must. This is the task that each of us can, with Jesus, finish here. Let us pray. Our heavenly Father, be with each of us, as we seek to find the true significance in our lives. We give thanks for our savior, Jesus, the Christ who invites us by word and deed to follow him. Give us the insight to discover his way for our lives, and the courage to follow the dictates of his commands when the way is long and the journey difficult. Let us not flinch from doing what is right, even when it is unpopular or costly. If need be, let us follow Jesus to the cross. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our savior. Amen. (organ music) (congregation sings)

- On this day, the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve us gracious, Lord and God from indifference to thy merits in death, from pride and self complacency, from needless perplexity, from the unhappy desire of becoming great, from hypocrisy and fanaticism, from envy, hatred and malice, from the deceitfulness of sin, from the influence of the spirit of this world, preserve us gracious, Lord and God by all the merits of by life, by thy human birth, by thy obedience, diligence and faithfulness, by thy humility, meekness and patience,

by thy extreme poverty, by thy baptism, fasting and temptation by thy griefs and sorrows, by thy prayers and tears by thy having been despised and rejected, bless and comfort us gracious, Lord and God, by thy agony and bloody sweat, by thy bonds and scourging, by thy crown of thorns, by thy cross and passion, by thy dying words, by thy atoning death, by thy glorious resurrection and ascension, by thy sitting at the right hand of God by thy sending the holy spirit, by thy prevailing intercession, by thy holy sacraments, by thy divine presence, by thy coming again to like church on earth or our being called home to thee, bless and comfort us gracious, Lord and God. Amen. ("Make me Clean") ♪ Make thee clean my heart from sin ♪ ♪ Make thee clean my heart from sin ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪ ♪ Make thee clean my heart from sin ♪ ♪ Make thee clean my heart from sin ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪ ♪ Make thee clean my heart from sin ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪ ♪ Make thee clean my heart from sin ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪ ♪ Unto Jesus, welcome giving ♪

- Here, now, the final words of Christ as recorded in the 23rd chapter, according to Luke. It was now about the sixth hour and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. While the sun's light failed, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two, then Jesus crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands "I commit my spirit." And having said this, he breathed his last. There are no easy words to use in this meditation. And there are no clever analogies that one can draw that could ever begin to convey the full meaning of the two monumental events contained in this scripture. We can not soften the impact of the death of Christ nor the meaning of his final words, as he knew it had come. There is no phenomenon in our mortal lives that I know of that can create more fear in man, can destroy seemingly invincible faith more quickly, can cause more heartache and bereavement, can even shake the foundations of love and trust than the anticipation or occurrence of death. No event that we know has the seeming finality and irreversibility that death imposes. And it makes little difference whether this occurs quickly or slowly, quietly or horribly, and there is no truly expected death. Most physicians would prefer to remember the happiness of new birth, the victory of triumphs over disease. But the fact remains that a predominant portion of our time is spent anticipating, combating and comforting in the circumstances surrounding death. Perhaps my own most overwhelming experience in this regard, occurred during a period of training, which was spent on the cancer and leukemia service in the National Institutes of Health. During that time, the anticipation of death hung over all of us, physician, nurses, staff, patients, families, like a choking fog. Our feeling perhaps was not unlike that which many of the crowd that had gathered in the final hours of Christ must have felt. Many days were spent in physical and mental struggle to ward off the end to achieve those temporary but blessed words, remission of disease. One was forced to deal with the many varied responses of the dying and the living as the end came near. And long hours were spent at the end, comforting loved ones, friends, husbands, wives, parents of little children that had been too young to ever know evil. No Christian could have lived through and with these experiences without a complete reawakening and reaffirming that the only source of continuing comfort, the only impregnable guardian of faith, the only source of solace and strength at these times must indeed rest in the final words of Christ Father into thine hands, I commit my spirit. These words were not new, nor were they unique to Jesus. Indeed, they had been framed in the prayer in the 31st psalm, into thy hand, I commit my spirit. Words, which he had undoubtedly learned as a young boy and carried with him through his life. And the spirit in the sense of these words should indeed not be new to any of us for who does not remember the first lines of perhaps the commonest of all prayers, now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord, my soul to keep. these words have always implied to me the essence

of the necessary doctrine and consolation for Christian man, not only in last hours of mortality, but indeed through every living day. Death brings us the sharpest reminder that it matters where life's trust is placed. Man can not have true peace with life until he has made peace with mortal death. There are in these final words of Christ, several elements that all Christians need hearkened to. First, there is triumph. Christ's 33 victorious years are summated, I think, in these final words, as he makes his last testimony and prayer before others, to God. There is no defeat here, since mortal life is transient, he now enters life eternal with God. We too must know and accept this. There is implicit trust in these words, his trust was complete. So must ours be. He gave not just a portion of himself, not just a part of his worldly goods, not some qualified or compromising token, but a complete surrender of his only eternal self, his spirit. How few of us have been able in our daily lives to achieve this? There is Supreme confidence and faith in these words, confidence that God will accept his spirit. Faith that the pains of life and of the cross itself, repentance, sacrifice, self denial, humble obedience will not have been in vain. Indeed, the scripture tells us that Christ spoke out in a loud voice, not a quiet, timid mumble. His prayer and testimony of his faith before others was confident and proud. How unlike many of ours. There is reunion in these words, as Christ returns to his and our father. Indeed, he has only added the word father to the psalm prayer of complete trust into thy hand I commit my spirit. This must emphasize to us that trust and confidence in God are not to be called upon only when trouble or death befall us. They must be our foundation for a daily Christian living. A daily enactment of our childhood prayer, now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Our prayers to God are pleas for his help must be reunions with him, not sporadic first events. Finally, all of these words imply a commitment. Not a commitment of our worldly goods, not a commitment only when we are frightened, not only when trouble befalls us, but a complete unqualified and uncompromising commitment of our mortal lives and our eternal spirit. We must live these day by day, not with the mask of indifference or thickening of spiritual skin, but live with peace in our commitment to God. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, enable us to capture the triumph, the trust, the confidence and faith that Jesus showed us on the cross, and give us the strength to commit ourselves now and forever to him. Amen.

- Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen. (organ music)