

(organ music) (audience murmuring) (organ music)

- Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God. Many reasons have brought us to this moment, but we all are drawn by one Lord and one faith. We pray thee make this hour service of thee worthy of thy praise, but make us too more receptive to thee that we may see the more clearly and love thee more dearly. Amen. (choir vocalizing) (organ music) (choir vocalizing) And inseparable Part of the experience of the fullness of God is the experiences of the deficiencies, the imperfections and brokenness of human life, however noble. Knowing, however in perfectly God's righteousness, let us confess to him our sin. God of grace, who in a dark time sent your Son to be the day spring from heaven, we confess our slumber. We are not awake to the loneliness of our neighbor or to the dingy ghetto or to a distant lands red with blood and hollow with graves or to the greed of our trade. We charge other persons with folly, hoping in this way to cover our failure. Wake us, we pray, even though the light is pain to our eyes, help us to cast off the works of darkness, clothe us with the light of Christ that we may be children of light, not cursing the dark, but heralding his new presence in joy through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Hear these words of assurance as we find them at various places of the Bible. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid? And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches, in glory in Christ Jesus. Amen. (organ music) (choir vocalizing) The witness from the old covenant comes from songs. Arise, Oh Lord. Oh God, lift up thy hand. Forget not the afflicted. Why does a wicked renounced God and say in his heart, "Thou wilt not call to account, thou to see yay, thou does no trouble and vexation. That thou may its take it onto thy hands, the hapless commits himself to thee. Thou has been the helper of the fatherless. Break thou the arm of the wicked and evil doer, seek out his wickedness till thou find none. The Lord is king forever and ever. The nations shall perish from his land. Oh Lord, thou would hear thee desire of the meek, thou will strengthen their heart. Thou wilt inclined thy ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed. So that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more." And from the new covenant, let us stand as we hear the Sermon on the Mount. Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him and He opened His mouth and taught them saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you, falsely on my account, rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you." And here ends the reading of the word. (organ music) (choir vocalizing) Lets affirm our faith and thus our oneness with all Christians past and present and future, here and everywhere. We are not alone. We live in God's world. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come and the true man Jesus to reconcile and make new. Who works in us and others by

His spirit. We trust Him. He calls us to be 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 with your Spirit.

- Let us pray. (clears throat) Oh thou, who art alpha and omega, beginning and end, create all and Redeemer. We thank thee that we are not alone and glass and music and song, in words and word. Thou does address us in a multitude of ways. We thank thee for the saints past. We pray for the saints present. We look to the saints to come. In a difficult time we do not always see thee clearly. We are comforted by the host of thy witnesses. We comment to thee oh God, our anguish for the world, for the hunger of Africa, for the wrath of Arab and Jew of Greek and Turk, of Vietnam brother and Vietnam brother. Heal the wounds, ease the passions and candle a spirit of Goodwill everywhere that peace may come. We pray also Lord for the nation in this difficult time, that here good will may temper passion. That wisdom may inform our congressional proceedings in these days. Help president and people to put aside ranker and vengeance, and to proceed in good caution and fair mindedness. Lord of life, we pray not spare the president. We pray not spare the nation. We pray thy will be done in America. We pray for thy church here and everywhere. Let thy true and lively word be always preached in every communion, keep clergy and people close to thee that the kingdom of God in your righteousness. Be always uppermost in all our doing and in all our resting. Judge us when we stray from thee, confirm and strengthen us as we draw near to thee. May our abiding joy lie always in our continuing communion with thee. In the name of Him, who is the way, the truth, the life, we make our prayer and also with Him, the same Lord we now pray as He taught us, 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 kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

- It's good to be here and to worship God together. This morning, we would like to focus our attention upon these words of scripture and upon the thoughts of blessings upon the discipline. There are some things which need to be clarified for us, if we are to live with meaning in these days. It is not enough merely to have meaning for one's own life, but one should live, so as to give meaning to the lives of others, and to live such a life is difficult. It is difficult because it requires of us to be self-conscious about how we live. It is to live a life that is open before the world, subject to all the harsh misunderstandings of which people are capable. It is to live a life that is open to criticism and even hostility. And this is difficult to do. Most of us would prefer to keep our real selves unknown from the world. We make mistakes, we sin, we fail, but we would adjust as soon other folks did not know this. It is difficult to live openly in the face of our fellow men and women. But such a life is difficult also, because it demands of us to be sensitive and to care. In days like these that is painful to be sensitive. When you have a tooth, which needs to be filled, if you talk too much out in the cool air, it hurts. And if you should come in out of the cool air and drink a cup of hot tea or coffee or hot chocolate, it hurts. To live a life that is sensitive to the human needs of these days is to be like a sensitive tooth. It hurts no matter what you do. But the meaningful life is difficult also, because it requires us to care. It is one thing to be open about one's life, it is something else to be sensitive to human need, but one can both hurt and be subject to criticism and misunderstanding and still not care. One may take pride and

openness. One may feel sorry for oneself or may feel why one not to feel when nerve endings have been touched. One may do all of this and still not care. To care is to begin to pinpoint the areas in which one must move in order to be of help. To care is to become involved. To care is to hurt, not just for one self, but for the other. To care is to begin to chart the direction for action. And so while it hurts to be sensitive, it costs to care. To live a life of meaning in these days for others and for self, is difficult because it demands that we take risks. Risk becomes the style of life for the person who would stand with those who are downcast and abused and oppressed. Now it may not be an American, but it is certainly uncommon to risk one's own position and status and security for someone else. But perhaps for more than any of these reasons, the life of meaning is difficult because it requires discipline. There are many sorts of disciplines, so it's important to be disciplined in the right way and about the right things. Discipline can be restrictive and destructive. When the Nazis put the Jews into ghettos and Poland, they imposed discipline, but that was not good. When slave traders from England and the Netherlands dragged Africans from their families and villages and locked them in chains and beat them, that was discipline, but it was evil. When black children were made to know that there were places they could not go to play, to study, to eat or even go to the toilet, that was disciplined. But it was as evil as that which had been imposed only a generation earlier by the slave holders and slave traders. When the Cherokee Indians, even here in North Carolina, were taken from their homes and placed in boarding schools. And then if they were caught speaking to one another in their own Indian language, they were beaten in front of other students, that was discipline, but it was evil and destructive. When white children were conditioned and trained to think of some things as white and for them, and to keep persons of other races in their place, that was disciplined, but it too was evil and destructive. For destroyed the humanity of that white boy or a girl or a man or woman. And it prevented the full maturity of the humanity of that child or adult of the other race. When men and women young or old are arrested for really minor offenses and thrown into cages with no caring human contact, nor effort to rehabilitate, that is discipline. But sociologists and psychologists and criminologists know that it doesn't work. Capital punishment is discipline, but it does not work according to most of the studies about it. Obviously, it can't work as rehabilitation, and obviously, it does not work as a detriment to others. Parents yell at their children and often beat them or deprive them of things all in the name of discipline, and children reenact it with their brothers or sisters, their neighbors, or their pets. And sometimes they to call it discipline. So you see, there is nothing automatically good about discipline, but there are some forms of discipline which are good and which are needed in these times. Since so many of the decisions which affect your life and mine are made today by computers, there is a lot of talk about building models. That's because models can be easily tested by computers. There are models for action, models for behavior, models for cities, models for growth, models for efficiency. It's a time of model building. And we need a model for what I'm speaking about in terms of discipline, and the scripture which was read this morning, provides it. How often do we read the be attitudes of our Lord and stumble over that passage, which says "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." What a power weapon that has been in the heart and the head and the mouth of white people dealing with blacks. It has been equally effective in the case of every group seeking to assert its superiority over others. We men have found it helpful in regard to women, it is been a factor in the history of labor management relations. It is true in the middle class and middle American attitudes toward the poor. West Virginia, my own state, the heart of Appalachia has suffered from the use of this beatitude by major corporations, which own so much and control so much. Even Duke Power is accused of this, even now in Eastern Kentucky. Bless are the meek, is made to sound like you must be patient. You must love, you must

accept your lot, but that is wrong. Jesus never taught of blessings for the squeamish and fearful, those who were willing to be abused and suppressed just so others could get ahead. You can't find such in the teachings of Jesus. But we have a way of tampering with the meanings of scripture, we would rather use the scripture, than listen to it. We would rather ignore it, than study it, and we would rather merely read it, than follow it. But if we would go back to the language in which the new testament was written, the Greek, and study the word, which has been translated as meek, we might suddenly find this passage coming alive. When I looked in the dictionary the back of my Greek New Testament, this is what a particular translator says of the word used in Matthew 5:5. Here the American version and the revised version render at meek. But the words never did at any time or in any passage of any author signify meek. When referring to animals, the word means tame, but we must go back to the ancient writings of Greece, centuries before the New Testament to find its original meaning. It was a word used of horses trained for pulling chariots. These were disciplined horses. They were skilled and proficient and steady. These are different qualities than meekness. Well, they never lost the quality of being a horse. And the only people who experienced Jesus blessing are those who never lose the quality of being persons. Indeed, to be in Christ to experience personally, a relationship to God through Christ is to find oneself as a person. This is the sort of discipline, which is good and worthy of the Lord's approval. And it is ours only as we receive it by His grace. It is that discipline of study and training and perseverance that makes one able to do better and better while he or she has the ability to do. For the horse, it was his natural ability to run and to pull any wild horse had those abilities, but it was the disciplined horse who pulled with a purpose and ran fast toward a definite goal. Blessed are the discipline, those who work and pull with a purpose and move ahead toward definite goals. When given his true interpretation, the passage takes on new meaning. It becomes a meaningful and irrelevant passage for us in these times. It is the word of Jesus to those who organize and strategize for change. It is the blessing of God upon those who get the job done. That is those who are able both to care and to implement their caring and helpful ways. Go back then and read the beatitudes, and they cannot mean the same. As long as the word meek is there, the whole thrust of Jesus blessing is taken away. Read the last two of those beatitudes, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revalue and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you, falsely on my account. Now is any really meek person going to get into that sort of trouble. In our corporations and institutions, we have a character we call, the yes, man. The yes, man does exactly what the boss says to do. Even if he might've had a better idea, he has no spine, no soul, no being for himself. He just says yes, or yes, sir, and becomes the lackey for the boss. Many of our schools instill this in our children. The old cartoon character, Caspar Milquetoast was based on the yes man. Such a person has no one's respect and is often the object of derision and scorn. But is this person going to get reviled and persecuted in the sense in which the prophets did, is he or she going to be blessed. But let the word, which reads meek be rendered discipline, and you have trouble on your hands. The man or woman who is disciplined to pull hard and to run straight, to get the job done and reach the necessary and appointed goal, that person is going to run into trouble. When he or she exercises discipline in choosing the issues for action, one has already chosen trouble. For undoubtedly, the issues such a person will choose will upset the folks who want things to stay as they are. And when he disciplines himself to stay with that issue until it is resolved, until the goal is reached, there will be trouble, because those same folks will want to get off that subject to let it rest, to ignore it at least for the time being. And we need only reflect on the experience of those who raise moral questions about the US role in Southeast Asia or more recently, those who questioned Watergate issues, and the examples are

overwhelming. Jesus knew that when He blessed the discipline, He had better bless those who would get into trouble with the authorities and the establishment. And He gave them two blessings, you read it, now, I think it makes sense. Blessed are the discipline. You can be sure they will inherit the earth because they will be there when the will is read, the undisciplined will be out fooling around or running errands for the folks who want to steal the inheritance. But the disciplined are going to show up and be there again, and again and again, until that matter is settled and there is another issue to resolve. We read from the songs, that God will attend to the meek and He will do so by seeing that justice is done in the face of the oppressor. Blessed are the discipline, for they shall inherit the earth and trouble on the way. But listen further, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you, falsely on my account, rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, or so man persecuted the prophets who were before you. It is important to be open and sensitive. It is important to care and to risk for others, but in these days it is more important and much more blessing to be disciplined. In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Let us pray. Eternal and gracious God, we come to you in these moments asking that we might be disciplined by the indwelling thy spirit. That we might be given clear visions as to the issues and the tasks, it might faithfully serve thee in such ways that justice shall roll down like waters and even like a muddy stream. In the name of Jesus Christ, who grants us this blessing. Amen.

- Our hymn is number 479. (organ music) (choir vocalizing) (organ music) (choir vocalizing) (organ music) (choir vocalizing) We are not so pretentious our Lord as to imagine these our gifts can do all that needs doing for thy ministry in the world. In faith and thanksgiving we present them, knowing the richness of life they acknowledge and the hope for life they represent. Thanks be to the oh Lord, for these and all thy gifts. Amen. (organ music) (choir vocalizing) The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds and the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. (choir vocalizing) (bell ringing) (organ music)