

- Duke University Chapel, service of worship August 21st, 1977. (incidental music) (gentle piano music)

- To each of you loved of God and called to be Christ men and women, grace and peace from God, the Father, and from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our heavenly Father at the beginning of another week, we come to you for help and light. We adore you whose name is love, whose nature is compassion, whose presence is joy, whose word is truth, whose spirit is goodness, whose holiness is beauty, whose will is peace, whose service is perfect freedom, and the knowledge of whom standards are eternal life. Unto you be all honor and glory through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (gentle piano music) We come today to accept God's mercy and forgiveness. To prepare for that gift, let us confess our sins and failures. Let us pray. Oh God,

- Forgive us for the way we sanctified vantages and elevate our selfish needs. We make our way of life the test of all societies and scorn all other styles. We seek your blessing and avoid your judgment, and make you in the image of our wish For our presumptions Lord, have mercy on us all. Amen.

- Who is like unto God who pardons iniquity and passes over transgressions? He does not retain His anger forever because He delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us, He will tread our iniquities underfoot. He will cast all our sins into the depths of the seas. (gentle piano music) (choral cathedral music) ♪ Amen ♪ I'm reading in the fourth chapter of the letter to the Philippians from verse 8 through verse 13. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard, and seen in me, do and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I complain of why, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me. May God richly bless the reading and the hearing of this portion of His holy word. (choral cathedral music) Let us affirm what we believe.

- We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come and the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust God who calls us to be the church to celebrate life and its fullness, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen our judge and our hope. In life, in death, and 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. Oh God, we are here today for many reasons. Certainly for all of us, it is a time to acknowledge that we are yours. We come into this service now from a world that beckons us to be elsewhere and tries to make us believe that acceptance comes by power and prestige. We see how efficiently the world conducts its business and its research, and the comparison dampens our enthusiasm when we see the manner in the unchanging attitude with which the work of the church is done. We see the confidence of the world and the apparent weakness of the church. Then our spirits cry out for help. We come knowing somehow that the world cannot sustain us and that our enthusiasm will be renewed, and our spirits will be enhanced by the indwelling of your Spirit. We bring our lives polluted by the sins of greed, anger, and mistrust, darkened by fear, anxiety, and indifference, hurt by sickness, disease, and death, defeated by doubtfulness, misgivings, and failures. We bring our lives because we have been promised forgiveness of sins, the light in the place of darkness, strength to bear the hurt and yes, victory over defeat. We now ask of you the fulfillment of these promises. Use the participants in this hour to lead us. And submitting our lives to the workings of your Spirit, we believe that as we leave this service we'll be fortified to more nearly live in accordance with your divine purposes. Bless us, oh Lord, in this hour and let us depart to serve you. Our prayer is offered in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us that when we pray to say, 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. Amen.

- So far today, most of us gathered here have arisen from sleep in our air-conditioned homes, showered and clean-shaven by electric shaver. And after breakfast having put the breakfast dishes and the automatic dishwasher using cumulatively, I don't know how many kilowatts of power and several 100 gallons of water have driven over to the Duke campus to this chapel using not much gas individually, but altogether, perhaps \$500 worth, here and to home and the day has hardly started. These are not vicious actions, they're very high-minded. We're going to worship in the Duke Chapel. What could be more Christian behavior than that? Yet now change the camera lens focus from this close up out to infinity, to how things would look from afar off from a transcendent perspective. While I am speaking to you now, an eight-year-old child in a village of the sub-Saharan desert in Africa is walking three miles through baking heat from the nearest well carrying the single bucket of water, which must do for the drinking and cooking and washing needs of her family six, eight members for the night. And now, when it is dawn in the city of Kolkata in India an ox-drawn cart moves slowly through the back alleys. Onto the cart are thrown the corpses of the infants and the aged people who have died during the night. (clears throat) The world around, (clears throat) 10,000 people die everyday from starvation and the diseases coming from malnutrition. Viewed in this perspective, the contrasts are startling and my actions not quite so morally innocent. I use up in one day 50 times, the amount of energy consumed by a child in Rhodesia. The cars and trucks on the New Jersey Turnpike in one minute, use up more energy than is consumed by the whole nation of Zaire in one day. Americans constitute 6% of the world's population. They use 40 to 50% of the world's natural resources. Cushioned off as we are from these dark realities, we are not bothered in conscience by such contrasts. I'm reading The New Yorker. There's an ad early on of the Save the Children Federation a picture of a wistful, forlorn African child. The caption. You

can help save this child's life by sending in \$15 or you can turn the page. What do I do? I turn the page. To behold an ad for a man's suede jacket, \$275. True, I turn that page also, but the face of the child does not haunt my dreams. It's so cozy in here in my nice nest of things. I'm so preoccupied with them with turning the thermostat, just so for my comfort that I can conveniently close out any consideration of human need from afar off. My wellbeing depends on having the maximum amount of things to assure convenient and pleasurable living. If you don't believe this, hang around the dormitory driveways on campus next weekend when parents arrive to bring the freshmen class. They come with station wagons full to the brim and piled high on top. Of late years, I've seen a few U-Haul trailers loaded with cushions, stereos, electric dryers, baggage, et cetera, presumably all indispensable in a bare survival kit. That's rather different from when Thomas Carlyle walked some 80 miles from an on his home in Scotland, carrying his luggage on his back to enroll at the University of Edinburgh as a freshman. How does the word of God speak to us in this situation? To look at this from under the sign of the cross, the word is both one of judgment and radical criticism and the word of grace and redemption into a different lifestyle. From the perspective of the Christian faith, there is a moral cost to this high living, even though we take it for granted with hardly a twinge of conscience. These apparently benign ways of our lifestyle prove not to be so noble after all when one thinks of the needs of the family of man, which our comforts deny to them by benign neglect are high consumerism, prodigal waste are enormous consumption of energy are not bought without moral costs. America loses about two thirds of the energy it consumes. Half of that in the inefficiency of machinery, but half of that loss equivalent to 12 million barrels of oil a day is waste. But we are charged by the Christian faith to be stewards of the Lords earth, to till and keep the precious, but precarious garden, to use the resources of ground and forest and ocean responsibly. Yet now, the dire consequences of our misuse of the earth in plundering it's unreplenishable resources to sustain high productivity are beginning to loom, dark, and close in the energy crisis. We have already reached beyond the limits to growth, though we can't really believe it. After the gas shortage a couple of years ago, people went right back to more energy consumption, big cars. Well, we say, "There's enough gas left to get me home." Posterity, why should I care for posterity? I'll not be around to see them suffer from my waste and any way, they'll figure out some technical device to get by. And so our selfish excuses twist and turn, but they cannot avoid the judgment of God in His inexorable rule whatsoever you sow, you shall reap. If we continue to defy the laws of the stewardship of earth, the doom for our culture is sure. The negative critique of the gospel appears at another point that is in the distortion of our values possessed by our possessions as Thoreau put it, or as his friend Emerson said, "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." And these two seers lived more than a century ago. What would their comments be now, should they walk through South Square Mall? The radical criticism of our distortion of values is found in the haunting questions of Christ, "Which of you by being anxious for things can add one cubit to his span of life? Why be anxious about clothing, do not be anxious saying, 'What shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear?'" The curses of prosperity derive from our desperate anxiety about things in the distortion and values, which are preoccupation with acquisition and high consumption produce. We lose the nonchalance of faith, the serenity of the lilies of the field. And our preoccupation anesthetizes us to the needs of those neighbors in the family of man, that child in the sub-Saharan desert or in the Harlem ghetto or in Soweto. Our prosperity may make us well-rounded persons, but a very short radius of moral concern. On the other hand, the positive word of the gospel, the word of grace and redemption can be found in our text from Philippians. Saint Paul writes, "I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased and how to abound. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and

want. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." Saint Paul had been emancipated from a dependence on things. He is nonchalant, serene, steady, whether hungry or full. Why? Because he had the inner resources of spirit that empowered him to transcend every reliance on material things for his livelihood. He was freed to show forth the new spirit of God's love in Christ. He had learned the secret of abundant living. Christianity has rightly been called the most materialistic of all the major faiths. It does not despise things as bad, food, clothing, shelter, creature comforts. These are a part of the good life, but they are to be used as means and not worshiped as ends, for that becomes idolatry. Don't get me wrong here, I make no Christian brief against technology. Look what it has done to bring human healing in medicine and safety in education, the riches of history and culture at the turn of a knob. And I must confess, if I were a member of the board of trustees of Duke University, I'd gladly vote, yes

(clears throat) to award an honorary degree to the person who might invent a battery run air conditioner to be sewn inside academic gowns for all May or June outdoor commencements in southern universities, or for our preachers in the Duke Chapel during August. The quality though of good human community does not depend on things on technology, nor does technical skill it's assure in itself the good life. This point might be illustrated negatively and what happened in New York City on July 15th. The tragedy of the 20-hour blackouts there was not so much the failure of electric power, but the failure of moral power, moral controls in time of crisis, the burglaries and destruction of property where a 3,800 persons were arrested for looting. If we view our lifestyle from the Christian perspective, we can discern, not only the curses of prosperity, but the blessing in austerity. The burning moral imperative for anyone of Christian humanitarian conscience who faces the energy crisis, the destruction of the environment, the pollution of air and water, the imperative is to adopt a simpler life style. The new asceticism requires daily decisions for conservation of energy, cutting back on waste, recycling glass, paper, aluminum, even furniture and clothing through the Goodwill Industries or the Nearly New Shop. A woman wrote a good letter to the local newspaper the other day, describing the merits of her solar and wind-powered clothes dryer, a clothes line in her backyard. Well, you say, "Each little decision to turn off the light switch is minuscule like a teaspoon full of water added to or taken from Lake Michigan." Yes, but cumulatively, the many decisions for conserving energy can turn the rising line of energy consumption down. President Carter's energy program, imperative as it is, needs to be matched by a public will to cut back to live more simply. We can't survive just by a program of legislation engineered in Washington. There are blessings in austerity, physical blessings, simpler diet, the loss of excess weight, better health as thetic blessings. When you escape the car and walk or ride a bike or jog, you notice things you can't see or hear in a car, but the chief blessing is a moral one. For a reduction in our American consumption of energy and the resources of earth make available more of its yield to help to meet the mounting crisis of world hunger, both through voluntary sources like Church World Service and governmental measures or international economic aid. The moral the ground for the new asceticism is not that I suggest of the old asceticism, that is the denial of the body to prepare the soul for heaven, nor is it the Yankee reason for a frugality to gain wealth. No. The Christian moral reason for adopting simplicity of lifestyle is that thereby one may fulfill responsibility to the far neighbor, far in time and in space in obedience to the gospel in junction to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and find their from the richest blessing of all. And that means the redistribution of the world's resources on a more equitable basis. As one westerner put it, a delegate to the Nairobi conference of the World Council of Churches, "We must learn to live more simply that others may simply live." Let us pray. Almighty God, trouble us by thy word of judgment and inspire us by thy grace to learn to live more simply that others may simply live. In Christ's name we

pray. Amen. (gentle piano music) (choral cathedral music)

- You may be seated. Let us continue to worship God as we present unto Him our gifts and our tithes. (gentle piano music) (gentle piano music) (choral cathedral music) ♪ Alleluia alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ Accept Lord, the offerings your people make to you and grant that the work to which they're devoted will prosper under your guidance for the glory of your holy name through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. (choral cathedral music) And 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. Amen. (cathedral orchestra music)