- Sunday worship service. January 27th 1980, Duke Chapel. (light orchestral music) (easy orchestral music) (easy orchestral music) (easy orchestral music) (talking in far distance) (light orchestral music in distance) ♪ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord ♪ ♪ For my soul shall be joyful in my God ♪ ♪ With the garments of salvation ♪ ♪ Of righteousness ♪ ♪ As a bride adorneth herself with her jewels ♪ (choir singing brightly) ♪ With her jewels ♪ (choir singing brightly) (bright easy orchestral music) (choir sings in distance) (choir sings brightly in distance) (loud bright orchestral music)

- Good morning dear friends. I greet you in the name and in the spirit of Christ, our Lord. Grace to you and peace from the Lord, our gracious God by whose hand each of us has been made, remade, and is sustained day by day. The Lord bless you and keep you. The word of God says none is righteous, no, not one. All have turned aside. Together they have gone wrong. My friends, recognizing this and knowing we are upheld by grace and by mercy, we can freely acknowledge our own sin before the Lord, our God who forgives us, accepts us and loves us. Let us therefore confess our sin to almighty God. Most holy and merciful God, we acknowledge and confess before thee our sinful nature, prone to evil and slothful in good and all our shortcomings and offenses, thou alone knowest how often we have sinned in wandering from thy ways, in wasting thy gifts and forgetting thy gifts, forgetting thy love, but thou oh Lord, have mercy upon us, who are ashamed and sorry for all wherein we have displeased thee. Teach us to hate our errors, cleanse us from our secret faults and forgive our sins for the sake of thy dear son, and oh most holy and loving God, help us, we beseech thee to live in thy light and walk in thy ways according to the commandments of Jesus Christ our Lord. Dear friends in Christ, hear these words of comfort and strength, fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you, when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned and the flames will not consume you, for I am the Lord, your God, the holy one of Israel, your savior. Fear not, for I am with you. Let us hear and believe these words of forgiveness and assurance. Amen. Let us give thanks, for God is good, and God's love is everlasting. (congregation chanting) The Reverend Doctor Gardner Taylor has been for 32 years, the Senior Minister at Concorde Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, New York. What Time magazine has recently noted, the church and higher education have known and believed about him for many years. That here, in Doctor Taylor is one of the church's all time authentic preachers of the word of our Lord. It is our distinct honor and privilege to have him as our preacher for today. Doctor Taylor, in gratitude and in eager expectation we welcome you, and we'll hear the word which you bring to us today. God bless you, sir.

- Let us pray. Dear God, as we enter the decade of the 80s, help us to set our minds, our hearts, our lives on thee. Help us to know that we were lost but now we are found. Amen. The old testament lesson is from the 24th chapter of Joshua versus 14 through 28. Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods which your father served beyond the river, and in Egypt and serve the Lord
and if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your father served in the region beyond the river, or the gods of the emirates in whose land you dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we shall forsake the Lord, "to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God, "who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, "out of the house of bondage, "and who did those great signs in our sight, "and preserved us in all the way that we went, "and among all the peoples through whom we passed, "and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, "the emirates who lived in the land, "therefore we also will serve the Lord, "for he is our God." But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, "for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God, "he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. "If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign Gods, "then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, "after having done you good." And the people said to Joshua, "Nay, but we will serve the Lord." Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves, "that you have chosen the Lord to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." He said, "Then put away the foreign gods which are among you "and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, "and his voice, we will obey." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day. And made statues and ordinances for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God and he took a great stone and set it up there under the oak in the sanctuary of the Lord and Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, "for it has heard all the words "of the Lord which we spoke to us. "Therefore it shall be a witness against you, "lest you deal falsely with your God." So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance. Here ends the reading of the lesson from the old testament. Amen. (mid tempo orchestral music) ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ (choir singing monotone) ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ (choir singing brightly) ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ (choir singing brightly) (choir singing lightly) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (choir singing lightly) Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the Gospel lesson? The Gospel lesson is from the 15th chapter of Luke versus 11 through 30. And he said, there was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the sheer property that falls to me." And he divided his living between them. Now, many days later, the younger son squandered all he had and took his journey into a far country and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into the fields to feed swine and he would gladly have feed on the pods that the swine ate and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired servants "have enough bread to spare, but I perish here with hunger. "I will arise and go to my father, "and I will say to him, father, "I have sinned against heaven and before you, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. "Treat me as one of your hired servants." And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him, and the son said to him, "Father, "I have sinned against heaven and before you. "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, "and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, "and bring the fatted calf and kill it, "and let us eat and make merry, for this son was dead, "and is alive again, he was lost and is found." And they began to make merry. Here ends the reading of the Gospel lesson. All praise and glory be to God. (organ music begins) (choir singing brightly)

- So my friends it is pleasure and privilege to come to this place today. I am not unacquainted with the
esteem in which this university community is held. And I know something of the reputation for research and reflection which this university enjoys. But I must say to you that the name Duke University came first to mean something to me on an Atwater Kent radio. Where a man named Wallace Wade was leading some people in a contest in the Arroyo Sequel at Pasadena. In more years than some of you I know can recall. One was not sure after the comment, whether Alex Haley's widely talked about book, Roots, was fictionalized biography or biographical fiction. Whatever it was, there are in it almost intolerably touching scenes. None I think is more moving than that incident in which Kunta Kinte drives the slave owning physician to a neighboring plantation for a party. Sitting in the cool southern evening, suddenly Kinte hears music coming from the slave quarters. He can tell by the sound of the music that it has the purity of the sound of his own native Africa. Almost breathless, he rushes to find the source of the music discovers indeed, the musician is another African brought but recently from the homeland. They talk excitedly, the other from Ghana as he has been brought from Gambia. They talk excitedly through the evening about home and family. And those other tender remembrances of a place far away which they would likely never see again. When the evening has passed, and Kinte is back in his own cabin, he thinks through the rest of the night. Because slave owners and slaves perhaps for differing reasons have discouraged talk, the language of home and talk about it, this has been the first time that he has had a chance to really engage himself with reflections upon his home at any length. So through the night he thinks of family and language and place. Those rituals and states of being which give structure and meaning to life, then toward morning, there is this word from Kinte's reflection, he realizes that day by day, year by year, without even realizing it, he has forgotten who he was. It is to describe again and in this gripping way, the crisis of identity. Two decades and I guess a half ago now and more, a segment of the American population began wrestling earnestly and somewhat systematically with this matter of identity. Much of that period to provide by the saying black is beautiful was froth in form but that's true of almost any movement. It did have an authenticity which was picked up by many other groups in America. That authenticity being the legitimate attempt and responsibility. To find one's place in history, how he or she has been contoured by the circumstances in which that life single or group corporate has been lived. Other portions of the American population took that cue and began searching about for their own groups. We came then to a realization about the American undertaking that the old melting pot theory was from the outset, faulted and inappropriate. This was not meant to be by the God of history as some of us believe it to be ordained was not meant to be a melting pot but a concert of ethnicities brought together in a harmony. The extent of our failure to produce such a concert ought to be produced in such a concert depending upon your angle of faith is almost exactly the measure perhaps of our failure in the world to claim the right of influence. Deeper than the matter of race or culture or ethnic origin or what have you, is the universal question. The insatiable, almost inherent curiosity. Who am I? What is the meaning of my time in the earth if it has any meaning. And to that question who am I, many replies come back, some glibly, some studied. One branch of investigation says you are protoplasm. Blood. Bones. Or an incredibly intricate system of plumbing and pumping, and locomotion. And true, but the question persists, who am I? And another area of investigation says you are mimed in thought and impulses that lay below the level of awareness in the dungeons and catacombs of the unconscious and to which we give ascent, and yet the question persists. Another says you are a unit in a system of work and rewards and we agree. Common sense gives its own clipped terse definitions, an American, black, white, Baptist, Methodist, what have you. All true. And yet neither explains us, nor all together for there are tides that flow in us. There is poetry in us, there's music, there is some yearning for worship and other things, sometimes, it seems as if a veil is rent,
and we into glory peep. There are transfigured moments in life when all of these definitions together do not explain us, there are mysteries in us. We turn to Jesus. There he stands astride the centuries. Always on a little beyond and yet with each succeeding generation. No matter where we start looking at him at last if we are honest with ourselves, our tongues loosen and our knees confess. He is our carpenter square, our tape measure, our compass steady and sure. He fixes our human existence in terms of a parable. Perhaps there’s no other way by which to explain it. It was a parable which George Butrick to whom we all owe so much and who was who went to be with the Lord this very week reminded us how George Meredith called it the most divinely tender and the most humanly touching story ever told on earth. It has passed into the language and into the thought of all succeeding generations as the parable of the particle son. Though Edwin McNeil Potic thought it ought to be called the parable of the prodigal father for it was he who lavishly poured out his love upon his children. While the scene is memorable, and is familial, there is a home, a family. Suddenly into the quiet and order of that home, a discord breaks. One of the sons says to the father give me now what is mine. Is this to state the age old heresy of our humanity? The counterfeit notion that we are here to get, to grasp, to grab. Is this underneath all of the other divisions and fractures of our American society basically what is wrong with us, the greed, which eats away at the nation's destiny and future. An elimination of all except number one, give me what is mine. Because love is sometimes wiser than mere wisdom and because the father realizes that home can never be home unless the lad wants to be there. He gives him not so much what is his but what might become his. The story moves along its inevitable lines. One can foreshadow how it will come out and yet the movement of it is gripping in however many retellings there might be of it. The boy goes into a far country so the lovely language of the King James version puts it, he leaves home, and that leaving of the parental house for those who are left behind, even under the brightest circumstances is almost always a heart wrenching thing. All of us one day blithely set out and even under the most favorable and friendly circumstances, not realizing what aches of heart we left with upon our departure. Some of you have but recently done so and you will not know the ache of it until in turn you are the left. Well, divine as the story runs as I said along its inevitable line, the boy squanders his living, his resources. At last he is without funds and without friends. Which is almost a natural parallel. His clothes become threadbare and his sandals wear thin. He hires himself out to another, this boy who would be free is now a hiring because there are counterfeit promises made by life and by Which prove at last to be exactly that, counterfeit. Then the story reaches its bottom point, it says that this lad, a princeling mind you, born to a noble house, of a goodly lineage, is sent out to feed the hogs and then the bottom line. He fane would have eaten the husks. In the Louisiana swamp country where I grew up it was called slop. It is not too strong a word I think to refer to the polluted diet upon which we often feed our spirits. Then, right there. The story takes a sharp, a dramatic turn. Jesus says at that lowest point, and when he came to himself, what is the master suggesting? Is he saying that when we are at our worst, we are least ourselves? Is he talking about some dignity and some decency which reside below that which we show to the world and which we shelter ourselves, the superficialities, the cynicism, the indifference toward what is high and noble and sacred. It is his way of saying that indeed. The imago, what the old theologians called the imago dei, the image of God is in us and however much covered over, and obscured, it is there. When he came to himself, saw that we Jesus was saying are not born really for the ditches, but for the skies. That is something August, don't you sometimes catch hints and summarizes of it in your own spirit. There is something August about our humanity. Infinite. Splendid, shining. And that when we are untrue to that, we are untrue to what we really are. No matter what the cynics say to us, the skeptics, is it not true about our own country, was this land not created for
something nobler than what we have come to so far? Here was a nation given the impurities, granted the compromising circumstances of its origin but also given the nobility of its greedy tremendous, the titanic political considerations which this nation was given with which to grapple? Never before in the history of the world had a people been brought together out of so many diverse backgrounds and out of so many differing origins and with so many divergent beliefs and religious creeds and given the privilege, both in terms of those who were here when the rest came and those who came one after the other. Given the privilege to contract a society, if you please. Which would indeed be as I said at the outside a concert of ethnicities. A blending of divergence. A harmony of all of the different voices of culture. Where in the history of the world had any people been given that privilege, oh, someone says in the Greek states but they were far more homogenous. Certainly not in the empire, the Roman Empire with all of its divergent population. Read the Declaration of Independence and even in cold print if you read it as if you had not done so before, it is to make the heart almost skip a beat. You remember how it begins when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to disarm the political bands that have bound them to another and so forth, to assume among the peoples of the earth are free and equal station. Language that sings. We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal. That they are endowed not by any parliament or congress. They may enable but they do not endow, endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. What a noble creed. How we have named it. And defaced it. And disfigured it. To what tragedy? Now apparently with the geography of the world having turned against us, having favored us for so long, we in this land with all of its privilege and its privilege, having created a giant which needs a fuel which we do not have, and who knows where that will lead. But underneath it all is there not something to be said about the failure of our spirit, our refusal, almost steadfast I started to say to become what we were intended to be, to be ourselves so that today we are distrusted, looked upon with suspicion. Almost wherever people long for liberation and we had it, may still, but we had it. God glad that we still do. In our hands, do you know, it was ours. Nobody else had it, that was in our creed, and now and again we started up toward it in our grand revolution. Mr. Jefferson talking about how what one of your southern historians called our peculiar institution saying about it I tremble when I remember that God is just and yet refusing to set it down in the founding creeds of the land, even in the largest fraud ever perpetrated upon history or any normal leap of faith that one day it would pass from the land. Then again when the nation went down into its baptism of blood in the great battlefields of our civil conflict, names which still ring with a kind of solemn cadence and resonance in the national memory and tedium, Pennsylvania, Gettysburg, Port Hudson, on and on. (speaks softly) And yet we fell back, now, everywhere people look upon us with suspicion and we had it. This was our true self. God granted we can have it yet again. Well, what our Lord is saying to us is that I come back to it, that there is something basically decent and more than that there is a dignity that belongs to our humanity. There is something splendid, something August, something normal, something royal about us, that we are indeed of the family of God with all that that means. We stray from it, but thanks be to God there are voices calling us back to it to what we really are, to what you really are, to what I really am. Some of them are stern or scared voices. A meaninglessness, a sense of purposelessness, and aimlessness, which can be met only by by trips and by inducing some sense of well being. Buy drugs or what have you, or alcohol or what have you. In the midst of it, we realize how empty we are, there are stern osteer voices, one of them I have already mentioned, our failure in history so far, and I repeat, God granted we have still now in this our generation, one other chance, God granted, we seize it. Stern osteer voices out of the past of those who have had such bright promise in life and who have brought the days of their years to such a sorry past, they
stand stark in the memory of history. But there are sweeter voices calling to us, urging us, luring us, toward what we are really meant to be. For some of us, dear, dim, dead faces out of the past, for many of you, not so dear, men thank God not yet gone. Fathers and mothers, and parents, I mean teachers and ministers and other people without rank and without place who brought it off nobly, who have lived lives of decency and aspiration. They beckon us. And in our national memory, the Washingtons, both of them, George and Booker, Lincoln sorrowing his way in the heartbreak of the nation to his own death. Martin King fallen in Memphis, and yes in this very state I heard on one of your television stations last night the account of, the recollection of how in this very state almost within a stone’s throw of this place some people 20 years ago at a lunch counter called the nation to clarify its vision and which beginning here in this very state of yours, enabled our nation to begin speaking at least with a little surer voice about human rights. But above them all is that figure, our Lord Jesus talking about who we are, your father knoweth. How much more are you worth than many sparsers? When one goes outside the city’s gates and stands or better still kneels at that cross and looks up in the darkness, in the pain in the heartbreak of it all, in the heat and dust. The groans and cries and curses and prayers of that Friday realizes that here is the price tag that God puts upon each of us, cavalry. We begin to see something of what we are, and what we are meant to be. Kings and priests I tell you, princes and princesses of the royal house, sons and daughters of God, born for the everlasting, made for the forever. And something more, it does not even yet appear what we shall be. When he came to himself. Hm. (organ music begins) (bright organ music) (choir singing lightly) (choir singing lightly)

- Remembering now, who we are, let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in 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, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

- And with you.

- Let us pray. Oh Lord our God, help us always, always to remember and to believe that we do indeed belong to you. To hear and know again even now I am the Lord your God, I shall be your God and you shall be my people. Oh gracious God, you who are always loving, we know in these moments our own weakness and we know also your power, help us in these moments to take our helplessness to your strength, our ignorance to your wisdom, our sin to your purity, our need to your love. Oh Lord, our God, we cannot decide rightly what we should do. Give us guidance which will save us from our mistakes. We cannot overcome our temptations. Give us the grace which can make us clean and keep us clean. We cannot bear the heaviness of life. Give us the strength to pass the breaking point of life and not to break. We cannot escape the worry of life. Give us the peace that passes all understanding which the world cannot give or take away. We cannot face the responsibilities of life, help us to know that there is absolutely nothing that we have to face alone. We cannot love even our neighbors whom we have seen. Give us a sensitivity to others that will give life to them and to us. We cannot find the right way. But oh God grant that at every crossroad of life, your spirit may be there and we may know it and find direction. We come to you, oh Lord as the younger brother came to his father, we come to you for strength in life, and for hope when life is ended. Through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us and all who believe in him to pray as we pray now. 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. (light organ music) (choir singing brightly) (choir singing softly) (choir singing brightly) (bright organ music) (choir singing brightly) Oh Lord, our God, we praise you for the gift of Jesus the Christ who for our salvation laid aside his glory and took upon himself the life of a servant. Accept these gifts and accept us oh God, and grant that from this time forth we may feel that we have been renewed by the words and the actions of Christ. Help us from this moment on to love and serve others with the same love and spirit lived out in our Lord and savior even Jesus the Christ. Accept now oh God the gift of ourselves which we make to you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (bright organ music) (choir singing lightly) (choir singing lightly) (choir singing lightly) In observance of the week of the prayer for Christian unity, at four o clock this afternoon we will have a very very special ecumenical service here. You are invited to come and share in that special time of worship with us. Now, may I offer you this blessing in the name of our Lord. The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, the communion and fellowship of the holy spirit, be with you and with those whom you love, this day and forever. (choir sings slowly) (loud deep organ music) (bright uplifting music) (bright organ music) (bright organ music) (bright organ music)