

(organ music)

- Good morning and welcome to Duke University Chapel. The flowers today, are given by the office of student life in honor of our parents, who are visiting here this weekend and we welcome you. We also welcome those Duke alumni who are here for your reunion weekends. And now, let us join together in the praise of God. ♪ Beautiful Savior, lord of our nations ♪ ♪ Son of God and son of man ♪ ♪ Glory and honor, praise, adoration ♪ ♪ Now and forevermore be thine ♪ ♪ Now and forevermore be thine ♪ (organ music) ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ Till all the world adore his sacred name ♪ ♪ Come, brethren follow where our Savior trod ♪ ♪ Our king victorious, Christ, the Son of God ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ Till all the world adore his sacred name ♪ ♪ Led on their way by this triumphant sign ♪ ♪ The hosts of God in conquering ranks combine ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ Till all the world adore his sacred name ♪ ♪ Each newborn servant of the crucified ♪ ♪ Bears on the brow the seal of him who died ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ Till all the world adore his sacred name ♪ ♪ O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree ♪ ♪ As thou hast promised, draw the world to thee ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ Till all the world adore his sacred name ♪ ♪ So shall our song of triumph ever be ♪ ♪ Praise to the crucified for victory ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ Till all the world adore his sacred name ♪

- Grant us lord, not to me anxious about earthly things but to love things heavenly. And even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen. As a favor to many of you in our congregation who are standing in the aisles, we would ask those of you in the pews to please move towards the center as you take your seats. Thank you. (murmuring)

- Let us pray. Open our hearts and minds, oh God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that as the world is read and proclaimed, we might hear with joy, what you say to us this day. Amen. The first lesson, is taken from the book of Isaiah. Seek the lord why he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous one, his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him. And to our God, for God will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thought than your thoughts. This ends the reading of the first lesson. (organ music) ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ ♪ Sing a new song, sing a new song ♪ ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ ♪ For God has done marvelous things ♪ ♪ Through God's right hand and Holy arm ♪ ♪ Salvation comes ♪ ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ ♪ Sing a new song, sing a new song ♪ ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ ♪ For Lord that they know the victory ♪ ♪ God's justice has come to all ♪ ♪ For this be your child, your grace ♪ ♪ Remember God's love at heart ♪ ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ ♪ Sing a new song, sing a new song ♪ ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ (soprano voices sing) ♪ Sing a new song to the lord ♪ ♪ Sing a new song, sing a new song ♪ ♪ Sing a new song to the Lord ♪ (organ music) ♪ Glory be to our Creator ♪ ♪ Praise to

our Redeemer ♪ ♪ Glory be to our Sustainer ♪ ♪ Ever three and ever one ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪  
Now and ever shall be ♪

- The gospel lesson is taken from Matthew. While the kingdom of heaven is like a house holder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with laborers for denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard, and going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And to them he said, "You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you." So he went. Going out again about the sixth hour, and the ninth hour he did the same. And about the 11th hour, he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, "Why do you stand here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You go into the vineyard too." And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first." And when those hired about the 11th hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it, they grumbled at the house holder, saying, "These last only worked one hour and you have made them equal to us, who have born the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last, as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose, with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" So the last will be the first, and the first, last. This ends the reading of the gospel lesson. ♪ I will lift up mine eyes to the hills ♪ ♪ From whence cometh my help ♪ ♪ My help cometh from the Lord ♪ ♪ Which made Heaven and Earth ♪ ♪ He would not suffer thy foot ♪ ♪ Thy foot which keepeth thee ♪ ♪ He will not slumber ♪ ♪ The Lord is thy keeper ♪ (choir sings hymn)  
(muffled singing)

- The epistle lesson. I thank God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for all of you making my prayer with joy. Thanking you for your partnership in the gospel. And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart. You're all partakers of me, of grace, both in my imprisonment and in my defense for the confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ, Jesus. Yes and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. As it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body. Whether by life or by death, for me to live as Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means faithful labor for me. Yet which is shall choose, I cannot tell. I'm hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and to be with Christ, for that is better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. "Why do you enjoy preaching in Duke Chapel?" The interviewer asked. And I heard myself replying because it is a great privilege to be with young people who are making so many important decisions in their lives. The way I figure it, of the four or five most important decisions a person will make in life, decisions about career and education and marriage, the chances are, most of these decisions will be made right here at Duke. And it is good to be with people who are at that stage in life. At the age of decision. And it's a particular privilege to be here at Duke, where we have so many gifted and talented young people. Who because of their gifts and talents,

have so many more interesting choices to make. Should I go into clinical work or pure research? Should I go to graduate school in French or should I go to the Law School? How wonderful it is to have such interesting alternatives from which to choose. And I know that the students would want me to tell you visiting parents how grateful they are, for all the opportunities you have given them, because with more opportunities, they have more choices. The person whose parents did not enable her to take piano lessons, does not have to choose between a career in music or a career in ballet. The person who spent his 17th year screaming up and down Sunset Blvd at all hours of the night, whose verbal skills were limited to, "What's happening baby?" This person does not have to agonize over which college to attend. Our age revels in choice, and have we Americans ever had so many different, interesting alternatives? Think of your grandparents, your great grandparents, think of your great grandmother. Chances are when she was the age of a Duke freshman, life was less complicated because there were fewer choices. Less complicated and less free. Most people followed a well-worn path, trod by their parents before them. There wasn't this agonizing over what to do with my life. There were few options. And we think less satisfaction because there were few options. My wife remembers talking to her grandmother and asking her, "Grandmother, how did you and Grandfather decide to get married?" And her grandmother looked at her, sort of confused and said, "Well his family owned the farm here, and my family owned the farm here, and we new that if we got married, one day we could combine them and have a larger farm." There wasn't much room for romance in that sort of world was there, agonizing over what ought I to do? And we are glad that that isn't our world. For you and I are apt to judge the happiness of a person on the basis of how many interesting alternatives and choices that person has to make in life. Today a woman is no longer limited to a narrow range of socially acceptable occupations. She can choose, and because she can choose, she seems more fully human, more fully alive. We have constitutional guarantees for freedom of choice. It's difficult to think of someone as a full human being who has no choice. How did you choose your husband? "Well, only one man ever asked me out and, so..." How did you decide to go into preaching? "Well I always thought about a career in science but then I flunked 8th grade algebra and so I thought maybe law school. But then I didn't do well in history either, and so, seminary." No, what kind of reasoning is that? What kind of life is that, with no real choice? For in my choice is my exercise of my highest human potential. I'm not just some vine clinging to whatever I happen to be planted next to. I'm not just some piece of flotsam bobbing along the stream of life, tossed this where and that. I can choose, I can decide, I can shape my destiny. I took this road and I didn't take that one. Oh a generation ago people were not so fortunate. But now we have freedom of choice. More to say yes and to say no. Abortion? It's a choice now. Sexual orientation, lifestyle, marriage, career? Don't you worry about what Mama and Daddy told you to do, or what other people say is right for you. You can choose, decide. Sometimes you parents criticize us here at the university. You say you send them to us right, but then they get their head filled with all sorts of strange ideas and notions, and they want to do things they didn't do back in River City. But this is education. I mean what is education except learning about all the interesting choices one has in life, all the different alternatives. Isn't this what growing up means, becoming someone who chooses? And thus it may seem strange to you to take as our text this Sunday a rather confusing testimony of a prisoner, a prisoner named Paul. For who could be any less free, any more devoid of choice than somebody who's in jail. His letter to the Philippians was written while Paul was sitting in a Roman jail awaiting execution. Paul writes, "I want you to know brothers and sisters, that what's happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. So that is has become known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard." What? The leader of the church is in jail. Caesar has Paul. He's been trying to get his hands on him, he's at

last got him. And if Caesar has Paul, then Caesar must have the church as well. Oh he's just trying to make us feel better, they said back in Phillipi when they got the letter. Yeah, stiff upper lip and all that. This has served to advance the gospel? A man lies in a hospital bed, both legs broken, body in mummy-like bandages, a mass of bruise and broken bones. You come in to visit him, you say, "Oh I'm so sorry that this terrible thing happened to you." And he says to you, "Oh well, it's not all that bad, I've gotten to catch up on my soap operas." No. I mean there are limits, even to the power of positive thinking, there are limits. Trapped. Paul is in jail, he has no power over his destiny, no way to move forward or to pull back. Paul says that he's gotten to preach the gospel to a couple of Roman GI's, big deal. That really doesn't change his situation. Now if Paul still had some choices, if he really had some meaningful decisions to make, some way to get over or around and out of this predicament, then he might speak of the advance of the gospel, but how here in jail? For have we not agreed that life is only life when there is possibility, and choice, and decision, and alternative. And yet, Paul's letter is a somber reminder that much of our lives is lived where there are no choices, no alternatives. I mean think about how much of your life, even if you're young, how many of the things that make you you, are matters over which you had absolutely no choice, no control, no decision. My name, my gender, my physical appearance, my accent. I know that many of you think that I'm affecting this accent in order to impress you, but no, I just happen to be born in South Carolina, lucky, I guess. Nobody asked me. Harvard's Erik Erikson believes that an infant learns trust in the first months of life, and that if for some reason the infant finds that this world is an untrustworthy place, in those first weeks, that person's ability to trust is damaged forever. Child developmentalists say that we learn half of everything we'll ever know in life by age three. So much that makes us the way we are, emotionally, socially, physically, mentally, is fixed. Matters over which we have no choice. Well how did you decide to become a Methodist? Well I, at age 12, made a study of all the worlds great religions and I narrowed it down to Islam and Christianity. And then I was neck and neck between Presbyterian and Methodism, and then-- No, I got put here. Nobody asked me whether I liked it or not. Let's speak frankly. For most of our lives, we are not dealing with a host of interesting alternatives. Rather we are deciding what to do when there are no alternatives. And what to do then? Oh, you got to choose between Duke and five other nationally ranked prestigious schools, but your parents can tell you that there will be times in life when you won't have such choice. Times in life when the only choice is to somehow live when there is no choice. And what then? What then? Oh you can shake your fist in rage at God. You can offer cynical comments about life. You can distort the face into a howl and climb under a rock somewhere. You can distort the voice into a perpetual whine. Oh I wanted to, but my father never let me... Oh I could have, but you see my wife, she didn't... The professor was down on me from the first day of class, what could I do? Or another way is to que sera, sera. That's the way it is, some are born well, some are born not so well, what can anybody do? My life is just one little spec in this huge pattern of things. Best to adjust and fit in and go with the flow, what can you you do? Paul writes from prison, "I shall rejoice, because I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Christ Jesus, this will turn out for my deliverance. Christ will be honored, whether by life or by death, because for me to life is Christ, to die is gain. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell, I'm hard pressed between the two." Wait a minute, what is this, which I shall choose? Paul is in prison, he's neither judge nor jury. What possible meaning can there be in his choice. Perhaps prison has disorientated his mental capacities. Or perhaps, just perhaps, Paul is saying there is a way even when there is no way. Listen to this prisoner, this ambassador in chains. Because there's going to be a lot of your life that will be lived in chains as well. Oh some of you are young, gifted, full of possibilities and potential. But it will not always be so. Even for you

there will be some closed doors, some brick wall, some way not to go forward or pulled back. For Paul and for us I suppose, the most insurmountable obstacle of all, the greatest closed door is death. Paul speaks of it, he's awaiting execution by Caesar. Death. And when you think about it, all of our little setbacks, and drawbacks, and pullbacks and all the closed doors, and the brick walls, all have behind them this grinning empty face of death. Elsewhere Paul calls him the final enemy. Death, the ultimate no choice situation. And in facing the final enemy, Paul tells his friends at Phillipi, "There is a way, even when there is no way. There is a choice, even when there's no choice. Friends, whether I live or I die, Christ shall be glorified in my body." Whether I live or I die. On the first Sunday of Lent, my friend Grady Hardin stood in this pulpit and preached. And on Monday morning he called to say that the tests he'd had the week before were positive. Even now, his life was in the grip of the enemy. "Thanks for asking me to preach," he said. "That'll be the last sermon he'll let me preach." Oh but there're ways we said, you're lucky to be here at Duke, there are therapies, there's chemicals, there's radiation, things to be done. For the next weeks, he did valiant battle with the enemy. It left him half of what he once was, but each time we would go into his hospital room with tears in eyes, Grady would find something funny and we would laugh, there would be raucous laughter. But every time the laughter died down you could hear him outside pacing the floor, pacing the floor, waiting, waiting for his opportunity to pounce. Impatient with all these former students and these preachers and family and friends, waiting. His day came on a Friday in June. Pentecost. The day in which the spirit of God descended, found Grady's spirit ebbing from him. This journey down this long corridor which had began in Lent, was going to end by Pentecost. You could hear the enemy waiting for us to be done, waiting for the people to be gone. But in his last breath, Grady roused up and led in prayer. Lord support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, when this busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over, then of thy great mercy grant us safe lodging, holy rest, peace at last. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. And the door swung open, and there was the enemy with the most forlorn look on his face you ever saw. Cause he had reached in his quiver to finally do the deed and all he had was holy rest and peace at last. Death's great victory party just ruined. And Grady roused briefly, and he stared him in the face and said, "Free at last, thank God, free." And five days later, they gathered in this chapel, and they sang Easter songs. So don't you ever forget one word, some words of a prisoner to other prisoners. Wherever life may take you, whether by life or whether by death, you can choose. Even when there is no way, there is a way. Amen. (organ music) (church hymn being sung) (singing muffled by organ)

Female Preacher: The lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

Female Preacher: Let us pray. Most merciful god, in choosing us to be your people, you have called us into relationship with our sisters and brothers throughout the world. We offer unto you these prayers for others, beseeching you to grant them fullness of life. We pray for people everywhere who seek to know the truth, and who dare to weave it into the fabric of their daily lives. For all who earnestly seek peace and who live lives that embody it. For all who suffer with those who are stricken, whatever their station in life, and to who help to bring the world into new awareness of our own frailties. For all who perceive beauty and order in the midst of chaos and despair. For all who stand up in any way to expose injustice, prejudice and inhumanity, even at the price of their own security. We commend you Savior God, those who stand in

special need of prayer this day. For all who bear the burdens of homelessness or unemployment and who suffer the pangs of hunger. For all who endure the trials of sickness and disease. For all who are paralyzed in the face of choices or responsibilities that consume them. For all who are burdened, not by too little, but by too much. Wielding power that renders them indifferent to the needs and rights of others. For all who are overwhelmed by loneliness, despair, or grief, and who question their reasons for living. And we dare to pray, eternal God, even for ourselves. Give us keener self-understanding, lest we think of ourselves more highly, or more lowly than we ought. Give us the sense of what is most vital and most valuable in our lives, lest we squander our years and waste precious energy. Give us a clear and compelling vision of the call to be disciples of Christ, lest we presume our own limited understanding of faith, to be all that you would ask of us, when you have created us to be so much more. We beseech the eternal God for the deep and unspoken needs within each of us. Bless this gathering, whatever our reason may be for coming here and may the light of thy love shine through us eternally. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, amen. And now in the spirit of Thanksgiving, let us offer our gifts and ourselves unto God. (audience murmurs) (orchestral music) (organ music) (hymn being sung in foreign language) (organ music) (congregation sings church hymn) (organ drowns out singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (congregation singing church hymn) (organ drowns out singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Oh Lord our God, the author and giver of all good things. We thank thee for all thy mercy's, and for thy loving care over all thy creatures. We bless thee for the gift of life, for thy protection round about us. For thy guiding hand upon us, and for the tokens of thy love within us. We thank thee for friendship and family, for good hopes and precious memories. For the joys that cheer us and the trials that teach us to trust in thee. Most of all, we thank thee for the saving knowledge of thy son, our Savior Jesus Christ, who taught us boldly to pray. 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. (organ music) ♪ God of grace and God of glory ♪ ♪ On thy people pour thy power ♪ ♪ Crown your ancient church's story ♪ ♪ Bring its bud to glorious flower ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ For the facing of this hour ♪ ♪ For the facing of this hour ♪ ♪ Lo! the hosts of evil 'round us ♪ ♪ Scorn Thy Christ, assail his ways ♪ ♪ From the fears that long have bound us ♪ ♪ Free our hearts to faith and praise ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ For the living of these days ♪ ♪ For the living of these days ♪ ♪ Cure thy children's warring madness ♪ ♪ Bend our pride to thy control ♪ ♪ Shame our wanton selfish gladness ♪ ♪ Rich in things and poor in soul ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ Lest we miss thy kingdom's goal ♪ ♪ Lest we miss thy kingdom's goal ♪ ♪ Set our feet on lofty places ♪ ♪ Gird our lives that they may be ♪ ♪ Armored with all Christ-like graces ♪ ♪ In the fight to set men free ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ That we fail not man nor thee ♪ ♪ That we fail not man nor thee ♪ ♪ Save us from weak resignation ♪ ♪ To the evils we deplore ♪ ♪ Let the search for thy salvation ♪ ♪ Be our glory evermore ♪ ♪ Grant us wisdom, grant us courage ♪ ♪ Serving thee whom we adore ♪ ♪ Serving thee whom we adore ♪

- And now go forth in peace and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the blessing of God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (organ music)