

(organ music)

- Good morning, I'd like to welcome you to Duke Chapel. Let me call a couple of announcements to your attention. Our guest preacher today is Dr. J. Alfred Smith, who is the Howard C. Wilkinson Distinguished Guest Preacher. Dr. Smith was here in October of last year and was very well received in the area. He is a lecturer and preacher. He serves as the senior pastor to the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California. This is a church of more than 4,000 members of which Dr. Smith has been the pastor since 1970. It's a testament to his gifts as a preacher and we are very grateful to have him with us today. He has also brought with him Lewis Sellars, who will be doing a solo for us. Mr. Sellars is the Chairman of the Board at Allen Temple. He is also a member of the choir there and he sings with the Oakland Symphony. We're looking forward to hearing him, as well. This week there are a couple of happenings in the area I'd like to call to your attention. Tonight from 7:00 to 9:00, the congregation will hold an old-time hymn sing and Bible quiz in the chapel basement, and you're all invited for that. Then, on Thursday evening, we have Dr. James Sire, who is the senior editor of InterVarsity Press, who will be doing a presentation on Why Believe Anything At All? It promises to be an interesting lecture and we invite you to come back for that. Please stand now as we begin our worship with the processional hymn In the Cross of Christ. Let us join together in the greeting. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- The splendor of Christ shines upon us.

Congregation: Praise the Lord. (organ music) ♪ In the cross of Christ I glory ♪ ♪ Towering over the wrecks of time ♪ ♪ All the light of sacred story ♪ ♪ Gathers round its head sublime ♪ ♪ When the woes of life overtake me ♪ ♪ Hopes deceive and fears annoy ♪ ♪ Never shall the cross forsake me ♪ ♪ Lo, it glows with peace and joy ♪ ♪ When the sun of bliss is beaming ♪ ♪ Light and love upon my way ♪ ♪ From the cross the radiance streaming ♪ ♪ Adds more luster to the day ♪ ♪ Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure ♪ ♪ By the cross are sanctified ♪ ♪ Peace is there that knows no measure ♪ ♪ Joys that through all time abide ♪ (organ music) ♪ In the cross of Christ I glory ♪ ♪ Towering over the wrecks of time ♪ ♪ All the light of sacred story ♪ ♪ Gathers round its head sublime ♪

- Let us pray. O God, whose foolishness is wiser than our wisdom, and whose weakness is stronger than our strength, draw us to yourself. We delight in the abundance and prosperity with which you have blessed us. Even more, we delight in the gifts we have received in Christ Jesus. With glad rejoicing, we approach you to find those mountaintops from which to make sense of our lives. Bless us, we pray, in ways we least expect, amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together the Prayer for Illumination. Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your

Holy Spirit, so that as the Word is read and proclaimed, we may hear your Word with joy this day, amen. The first reading is taken from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter one, starting with the eighteenth verse. "For the message about the cross is foolishness "to those who are perishing. "But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise "and the discernment of the discerning "I will thwart. "Where is the one who is wise? "Where is the scribe? "Where is the debater of this age? "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? "For since, in the wisdom of God, "the world did not know God through wisdom. "God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation "to save those who believe. "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, "but we proclaim Christ crucified, "a stumbling block to Jews "and foolishness to Gentiles. "But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom "and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters. "Not many of you were wise by human standards. "Not many were powerful. "Not many were of noble birth. "But God chose what is foolish in the world "to shame the wise. "God chose what is weak in the world "to shame the strong. "God chose what is low and despised in the world, "things that are not, "to reduce to nothing things that are, "so that no one might boast in the presence of God. "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, "who became for us wisdom from God "and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, "in order that, as it is written, ""Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."" This is the Word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- Let us sing responsively Psalm 15 on page 747. Please stand for the Psalm and Gloria. (organ music) ♪ O Lord, who shall abide in your tent ♪ ♪ Who shall dwell in your holy hill ♪ ♪ The one who walks blamelessly ♪ ♪ And does what is right ♪ ♪ And speaks truth from the heart ♪ ♪ Who does not slander with the tongue ♪ ♪ And does no evil to a friend ♪ ♪ Nor takes up a reproach against a neighbor ♪ ♪ In whose eyes a reproach is despised ♪ ♪ But who honors those who fear the Lord ♪ ♪ Who does not put out money at interest ♪ ♪ And does not take a bribe against the innocent ♪ ♪ The one who does these things shall never be moved ♪ ♪ All glory be to you, Creator ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ our Savior ♪ ♪ And to the Holy Spirit, blessed Trinity ♪ ♪ As it was before time began ♪ ♪ Is now and shall be forevermore ♪ (organ music) ♪ Remember your servants, Lord ♪ ♪ When you come in your kingly power ♪ ♪ 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 after 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 the children of God ♪ ♪ Blessed are those who are persecuted ♪ ♪ For righteousness sake ♪ ♪ For theirs is the kingdom of heaven ♪ ♪ Blessed are you ♪ ♪ When the world reviles you and persecutes you ♪ ♪ And mutters all matter of evil against you falsely ♪ ♪ For my sake ♪ ♪ Rejoice and be exceeding glad ♪ ♪ For great is your reward in heaven ♪ ♪ Remember your servants, Lord ♪ ♪ When you come in your kingly power ♪

- This reading is from the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, beginning with the first verse. "When Jesus saw the crowds, "he went up the mountain "and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. "Then he began to speak and taught them, "saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, "'for theirs is the kingdom

of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, "for they will be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, "for they will inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, "for they will be filled. "Blessed are the merciful, "for they will receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, "for they will see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, "for they will be called children of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted "for righteousness sake, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people 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 in the same way they persecuted the prophets "who were before you." This is the Word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God. (organ music) ♪ O Master, let me walk with thee ♪ ♪ In lowly paths of service free ♪ ♪ Tell me thy secret ♪ ♪ Help me bear ♪ ♪ The strain of toil ♪ ♪ The fret of care ♪ ♪ Help me the slow of heart to move ♪ ♪ By some clear, winning word of love ♪ ♪ Teach me thy wayward feet to stay ♪ ♪ And guide them in ♪ ♪ The homeward way ♪ ♪ Teach me thy patience ♪ ♪ Still with thee ♪ ♪ In closer, dearer company ♪ ♪ In work that keeps faith ♪ ♪ Sweet and strong ♪ ♪ In trust that triumphs over wrong ♪ ♪ In hope that sends ♪ ♪ A shining ray ♪ ♪ Far down the future's broadening way ♪ ♪ In peace that only thou canst give ♪ ♪ With thee, O Master ♪ ♪ Let me live ♪

- Let us pray. Heavenly Parent, you're light for our darkness, strength for our weakness, a hope for our despair, and out of the fullness of grateful hearts, we come thanking you for your rich mercy and we pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart would be acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer, amen. I'm very deeply grateful to my friend, Dr. Willimon, for the honor of preaching today here in the Duke Chapel, and I'm especially grateful that I'm not going to get into any difficulty being away from the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California, where I serve as senior pastor, because the chairman of the board just sang the solo. (congregation laughs) And I'm especially grateful for the warm hospitality of the Reverend Debra Brazzel. I want to preach today from the topic from January to December. A lot happens between January and December. And some of it is caused by you and by me. And some things happen, both good and bad, because you and I make them happen. And other things may occur, because there are others who affect us, either positively or negatively. But, nature has a way of invading our lives. Without human permission, at any time, nature can release the furious anger of earthquake, tornado, hurricane, fire, or flood to try to destroy or dislocate us. As an unsought visitor, death can sting us as an unwanted enemy. And yes, in the riddle of life's mixture of the bitter and the sweet, a loving and merciful God spares us from the illogical choices of humans and the irrational acts of nature. So with our text, we can affirm that the eyes of the Lord are always upon us and that his eyes are upon us and upon the land from the beginning of the year, even until the end of the year. With discipline, prayer, and daily meditation upon the sacred scripture, and you and I are able to obtain a faith and courage and wisdom for the living of these days, and so that we will not end up being victims instead of victors. Our sermon text throws three lights upon the dark road of the future and let us momentarily discuss them. And I love to call these three lights reality, actuality, and potentiality. And reality is that that many people deny. Without reality, persons exist in an artificial world of the unreal. Without reality, you and I are clowns in the circus of life. And our tales are told by idiots that signify nothing. And our toys are nonsense, our joys are balloons that soon burst. But, life is not life if it is spent in the penny arcade of self-gratification. A life is not real if it is sought in the fairyland of self-delusion, or if it is searched for in an adult Disneyland of capitalistic

consumerism. And because the world has often bowed down to the unreal gods of materialism, popularity, and pleasure, and too many persons seeking gold and have ended up not knowing what life is all about. And not experiencing what Jesus meant when he said, "I am come that you might have life "and that you might have it more abundantly." They know more about the things of the world than they know about themselves, and of others, and of God. But, if we are to move into the realm of reality, and somehow we must discover the existence of that which is not seen. And only God truly is real. All else changes and changes and changes. But, there is a certainty about God. There is an everlasting quality about God. And you and I make up a generation and then, we will leave, as other generations have done and as generations will do after us. But, God remains eternal. And no wonder the psalmist said, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place "in all generations. "Before the mountains were brought forth "or ever thou hast formed the earth and world. "Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." And somehow, when people deny the reality of God, they end up shortchanging themselves. And it's easy to deny the reality of God, but it is easier to live with the winds of the Spirit, taking one through life just as the winds propel a sailboat across the sea. But, if there is reality, there is also actuality. But, if one denies reality, it is also easy to reject actuality. Actuality is the making of an honest assessment of the present. Actuality is like the Blue Book that tells you how much your car is really worth or the assessor who informs you how much your property tax is or the doctor who provides you with the news of your physical examination or the professor who hands you your grade or the monthly reading of your bank statement. But, actuality is most effective if we take off our blindness and make the necessary honest, painful assessment of ourselves. And today, and someone might be interested in assessing one's mental health, or one's moral health, or one's economic health, or one's physical health. But oftentimes, the mental, moral, economic, and physical health does not improve until we realize to assess our spiritual health. And that's why Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, "and all else will be added unto you." And after assessment, what steps must we take in order to make corrections? What steps must we take in order to make improvements? And what must we do between January and December in making an effective assessment of ourselves? Well, we know that we do not want to deny the reality of God, for the denial of that reality is atheism. The rejection of actuality is falsehood. And the destruction of potentiality is genocide. But, when you and I plan or participate or remain passive in the destruction of our potentiality, this is spiritual suicide. And reality says, "God is," actuality says, "This is who I am," potentiality says, "This is who I am becoming." Potentiality comes into being not like instant tea or instant coffee or the preparing of a frozen food dinner in a microwave oven. Potentiality is like the painful practice of a baby who falls and rises while learning to walk. Potentiality is the growing seed that produces the stalk and finally an ear of corn after weeks of prayer and spiritual discipline. Potentiality withers, weakens, becomes stunted, and less than the best when Christianity becomes a monthly fix at the communion table or a hurried pay God my dues at the early service so I can rush home and worship in the tabernacle of the NFL, a spectator church, or midday communion at the Sunday brunch of our friendly restaurant. We Americans want everything to happen right now. And we Americans are in such a hurry, but true spiritual growth that enables us to reach our potential is a slow growth. Potentiality is slow growth sanctification that turns an ugly duckling into a beautiful swan. It's not easy to learn to love one's enemies. It's very difficult to mature to say, "Holy Parent, forgive them for they know not what they do." But, it takes real maturity to say, "Holy Parent, forgive them when they know "what they're doing." Potentiality is slow growth sanctification, I tell you. It is spiritual new birth that turns a pumpkin into a coach for Cinderella. It is spiritual rebirth that cleans up and dresses up a peasant girl into a princess. It takes a vicious outlaw like a

Robin Hood and makes him a knight in the court of King Arthur. It turns a prison inmate like a Charles Colson into becoming Charles Colson, the nation's best known prison evangelist. And when spiritual potentiality is the result of exercising the muscles of the mind in Bible study, the muscles of the soul in prayer, and yes, the muscles of the hand in Christian service, and the muscles of the mouth in praise and worship, then we can depend upon a level of maturity that will bring about reconciled relationships. A little David becomes a giant killer and a Deborah becomes not a Mary Friedan feminist, but an Alice Walker womanist who liberates both women and men. And First John three and two places our vision in proper focus so we can see without distortion. It says, "Dear friends, now we are the children of God. "And what we will be has not yet been made known." From January to December, we shall be working. From January to December, we shall be struggling, stumbling, falling, only to get up again to possess the land, to reach for our potential, to grasp for the fruit on the tree of God's promises. And when weary, we shall rest, when discouraged, we shall not quit, when defeated, we shall never turn back. We shall possess the land, a land of hills and valleys, an uphill journey of struggle, but there is the downhill race to victory. Never too long in the valley. From January to December, there are new hills to climb, new mountains to conquer, and we shall conquer them. We shall not be possessed, we shall be possessors. We shall not be victims, we shall be victors. We shall not be prairie chickens, whose heads are buried in the dirt, pecking for bugs and for worms. And we shall mount up with wings like an eagle, instead of living in the barnyard with the prairie chickens. We will realize that we were made for better things and we shall spread our wings and our faith will help us soar, for they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. We shall do it. We shall do it with faith in God, our reality. We shall do it with love for each other, as we face our actuality. With hope as our potentiality, we shall remember that the land which we seek to possess is a land which the Lord our God careth for. The eyes of the Lord are always upon it, from the beginning of the year, even until the end of the year. And yea, even from January to December. (organ music) ♪ ♪ God, who stretched the spangled heavens ♪ ♪ Infinite in time and place ♪ ♪ Flung the suns in burning radiance ♪ ♪ Through the silent fields of space ♪ ♪ We your children, in your likeness ♪ ♪ Share inventive powers with you ♪ ♪ Great Creator, still creating ♪ ♪ Show us what we yet may do ♪ ♪ Proudly we rise our modern cities ♪ ♪ Stately buildings, row on row ♪ ♪ Yet their windows, blank, unfeeling ♪ ♪ Stare on canyoned streets below ♪ ♪ Where the lonely drift unnoticed ♪ ♪ In the city's ebb and flow ♪ ♪ Lost to purpose and to meaning ♪ ♪ Scarcely caring where they go ♪ ♪ We have ventured worlds undreamed of ♪ ♪ Since the childhood of our race ♪ ♪ Known the ecstasy of winging ♪ ♪ Through untraveled realms of space ♪ ♪ Probed the secrets of the atom ♪ ♪ Yielding unimagined power ♪ ♪ Facing us with life's destruction ♪ ♪ Or our most triumphant hour ♪ ♪ As each far horizon beckons ♪ ♪ May it challenge us anew ♪ ♪ Children of creative purpose ♪ ♪ Serving others, honoring you ♪ ♪ May our dreams prove rich with promise ♪ ♪ Each endeavor well begun ♪ ♪ Great Creator, give us guidance ♪ ♪ Till our goals and yours are one ♪

Debra: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Loving God, whose care for us lasts from January to December, we give thanks for the many ways you provide for us throughout the hills and valleys of life. Thank you for your abundant gifts we've enjoyed in the good times and for your tender care through the bad times. Teach us Lord, to be as faithful to

you as you are to us, that our love for you might also last from January to December, all the days of our lives. Dear God, you have said that when we care for those you love, we reveal our love for you. We pray that our lives may be expressions of love manifested in service to others. We pray especially for those who mourn the loss of loved ones, that they may experience comfort in the midst of grief. For those who are in despair, that they may find the way that you open to those who seek you. For those who are lonely, that they may know the joy of friendship, as well as the fullness of your love. For those who are unemployed, that they may find meaningful work and sustenance. For those who are confused or struggling with an important decision, that they may find guidance and direction. For those who are ill, that they may be healed and that they may know your wholeness in midst of brokenness. For those who are estranged, that they may know reconciliation. For our nation, that our president and its leaders may be guided by your wisdom to create policies that are just and a society that values all of its members. Lord God, all of us have needed you in so many ways. We thank you that you are there for us. May we also be there for one another. Almighty God, help us accept the reality that only you are God, from everlasting to everlasting. Teach us to dwell in you. Help us accept the actuality of life by taking an honest assessment of our present, both our mental and moral and economic and spiritual health, that we may accept ourselves as we are. And yet Lord, don't leave us in the actuality, but help us realize our potentiality, that we may become the people you see us to be. Make us anew in the image of Christ, that we might have the abundant life you would give us from January to December, for it is in the name of Christ that we pray, amen. What offering can we bring to God? Truly all that we have belongs to God. Let us share in the joy of giving. (organ music) ("O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem") (organ music) ♪ Praise God, from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise God, all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Alleluia, alleluia ♪ ♪ Praise God above, ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise God, the Son, and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Alleluia, alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia ♪ Let us pray. We have been blessed, most generous God, beyond our deserving. We've been fed in ways we have not acknowledged. We come to your altar in thanksgiving for all the blessings of life. We bring our offerings with full intent to love our neighbors as ourselves and to return the love you have so lavishly bestowed. Use these gifts, and us, to accomplish the promises of your kingdom. Unite us with one another in your ministry of reconciliation, that we might be your people on earth. And now, teach us to pray together as Jesus taught his disciples. 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. 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) ♪ Come, we that love the Lord ♪ ♪ And let our joys be known ♪ ♪ Join in a song with sweet accord ♪ ♪ Join in a song with sweet accord ♪ ♪ And thus surround the throne ♪ ♪ And thus surround the throne ♪ ♪ We're marching to Zion ♪ ♪ Beautiful, beautiful Zion ♪ ♪ We're marching upward to Zion ♪ ♪ The beautiful city of God ♪ ♪ Let those refuse to sing ♪ ♪ Who never knew our God ♪ ♪ But children of the heavenly King ♪ ♪ But children of the heavenly King ♪ ♪ May speak their joys abroad ♪ ♪ May speak their joys abroad ♪ ♪ We're marching to Zion ♪ ♪ Beautiful, beautiful Zion ♪ ♪ We're marching upward to Zion ♪ ♪ The beautiful city of God ♪ ♪ The hill of Zion yields ♪ ♪ A thousand sacred sweets ♪ ♪ Before we reach the heavenly fields ♪ ♪ Before we reach the heavenly fields ♪ ♪ Or walk the golden streets ♪ ♪ Or walk the golden streets ♪ ♪ We're marching to Zion ♪ ♪ Beautiful, beautiful Zion ♪ ♪ We're marching upward to Zion ♪ ♪ The beautiful city of God ♪ (organ music) ♪ Then let our songs abound ♪ ♪ And every tear be dry ♪ ♪ We're marching through Emmanuel's ground ♪ ♪ We're marching through Emmanuel's ground ♪ ♪ To fairer worlds on high ♪ ♪ To fairer worlds on high ♪ ♪ We're marching to Zion ♪ ♪ Beautiful, beautiful Zion ♪ ♪ We're

marching upward to Zion ♪♪ The beautiful city of God ♪ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you and keep you, amen. (choral singing) (organ music)