

(choir singing in unison) (organ playing light music) (choir singing in unison)

(organ playing light music)

- Grace be to you and peace from God, our father, and from the Lord, Jesus Christ. Christians are a people who believe that life is a gift from God, a gift to be accepted joyfully and shared freely. We affirm here, we have been given life, but most of us have not truly lived. We have used our lives with reckless unconcerned as though they belong to us and to us alone. By our own fault, we have abandoned the fountain of waters and built broken reservoirs which hold no water. We speak well of love, and we curse our enemies. We take pride in freedom and slide into new slaveries. We cry out against exploitation and we exploit ourselves, and our neighbor. So once again, at this time and at this place, disillusioned by the anguish of the world, embarrassed by our own perversity and blundering, and compelled by a terrible hunger for personal and social wholeness, we assemble again to worship, to halt our haste, to attempt together, to open ourselves to the possibilities of the call of God, to come back once again to the Father's healing love. And so therefore confident that if we truly and earnestly confess the state of our lives before that love, they will be forgiven, restored, and returned to us with new meaning and with hope. Let us offer unto God, our unison, prayer of confession and for pardon. Let us pray. Oh Lord, Thou has searched us and known us. Thou understand if our thoughts are far off and are acquainted with all our ways. There is not a word in our tongues, but low oh Lord, Thou knowest it all together. Take from us all hardness and impenitent that we admitting our sins and earnestly facing our faults before Thee. May obtain pardon for all our guilt. Absolve us, oh God, from every kind of sin. Forgive us for trying to be clever when we should have sought wisdom. Heal us from the disease of trying to make names for ourselves, when we should have been seeking to glorify Thy name. Enable us, oh Lord, to find pardon now, and to attain everlasting redemption in the world to come. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. May we hear and receive with belief these words of assurance from the new Testament of our Lord. If anyone is in Jesus, the Christ, he is a new being. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. I say to you that the chain of complicity linking our twisted lives to our past guilt has been snapped by forgiving love. The door of our freedom is open. We may walk forward together in hope. Amen. (organ playing light music) (organ playing light music continues) (choir singing)

(organ playing light music)

- This morning scripture is from the seventh chapter of the gospel according to Matthew. "Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide that leads to perdition. There is plenty of room on the road and many go that way. But the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets. Men who would come to you dressed up as sheep, while underneath they are savage wolves. You will recognize them by the fruits they bear. Can grapes be picked from briars? Or figs from thistles? In the same way, a good tree always yield good fruit, and the poor tree, bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, or poor tree, good fruit. And when a tree does not yield good fruit, it is cut down and burned. That is why I say to you, you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who calls me, 'Lord Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly father. When that day comes, many

will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesied in your name? Cast out devils in your name? And in your name, perform many miracles?' That I will tell them to their face, 'I never knew you. Out of my sight, you and your wicked ways.'" Here ends the reading. (organ playing light music) (choir singing in unison)  
(organ playing light music)

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Let us give thanks to God for the power of all creation and the blessings that has given to each of us. Oh mighty God, our heavenly Father, it is right for us at all times and places to affirm our union with the fountain of nature and of history. Lord, as our doors of perception open, they testify to a universe of glory outside of ourselves. The touch of fabric, rocks, skin, the smell of pines, fish, the flowers, the smoke of incense, the taste of green and the blood of the vine, the sound of bird song and animals, waves, and of wind, of voice, and of music, the light of our sun and the farthest galaxies. All these, oh Lord, remind us of Thee. In our consciousness that the cosmos is everywhere, ready to blossom into a love, not of our devising. We rise into a sphere of liberation and of adoration beyond mere space and time. We hear words passing human speech, as our brother Isaiah once did in his own temple. Standing beside angelic energies with head vowed, we as he confidently offer Thee our songs of thanksgiving and of praise. Holy, holy, holy, is a power beyond all hosts. The fullness of the whole world or Lord is Thy glory. Blessed as the one who comes to us in Thy name. God of reconciliation and of healing to whom all things are possible. We offer our prayers of concern and petition for our world, for our brothers, and for ourselves. We call on Thy spirit, oh Lord, and we asked Thy presence and Thy ministering power for all the poor and hungry, the outcast and unemployed of this world, for children unwanted in their homes, for the wounded, for prisoners and exiles, for all those persecuted for conscience sake. We call on Thy spirit, oh Lord, for the sick and suffering in mind and body, especially for those made slaves by drugs or by fear in our time. We pray for all oppressors, and exploiters, and tyrants, that they may be confused and disarmed by love. We pray for victims of discrimination, harassment, and of brutality. Oh Lord, we asked Thy presence and Thy power for all whom we fear or resent or cannot love. We remember before Thee, those who are dying and have died, whether in bitterness or in tranquility, We implore Thy presence and aid for doctors, nurses, and social workers, for ministers to the poor, for organizers, students, and writers, who raise the cry for justice in our land and in our world. Oh Lord, our Father, we call on Thy ministering spirit that all who are coupled together may realize their union within the universal flow of all human love. We pray for all who are close to us here, and in every place. We ask that every person in his work may be able to express the child's vision. We asked that our grandchildren may inherit a restored planet by our efforts. We ask, oh father, and we call on Thy spirit that each one who enters our house may receive the hospitality, do the Christ when he bears. Be with us, oh God, that with compassion and fidelity, we may work for renewal until our lives in. Loving Father, lead us we ask, after the example of your son, always to meet violence with love. Set our feet toward those places where your kingdom of freedom is continually breaking into the world among the victims of force and neglect on every continent. Restore we asked to perfection every defect brought by our falling, into the fabric of your universe. Give the society of nations peace we ask, even while their mind is set on war, and in the end, oh power of nature and of history. Leave the remanent of your loyal people out to that marriage feast where

alienation will find its quiet in the spirit of the one who through doubt and temptation remain consistent. Even Jesus, our Lord and liberator, who taught us that when we should gather to pray together as Christians we might 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.

- Ever since I can remember, I have heard accounts of the influence and the spread of Christianity, which I have shared a common fallacy. Each time I heard or read one of these accounts, I had the uncomfortable feeling that something was incorrect. But the stories had a certain ring of validity to them and they sounded very complimentary of Jesus Christ. And so it was that I did not critically focus upon them until this summer. Upon doing so, I not only convinced myself that this fallacy is indeed present, but that the wide circulation which it enjoys has caused confusion among men of faith. And particularly upon among young people to the point that many sincere Christians have been led seriously astray by it. So the purpose of this sermon this morning is to identify that fallacy, to deny its accuracy, to show what damage it has been doing, and to suggest how we might go about undoing the damage. That is what I am going to attempt. Now, the story goes something like this. Jesus Christ was born in an obscure corner of the civilized world. He was reared by humble parents. He grew to manhood unknown in the great capitals of the world, pursuing the trade of a carpenter. For three years at most, he was a penniless teacher followed by simple believers. But at last, the powerful and ruthless men who were his enemies moved in on him and brought his life and teaching to an abrupt end before he had traveled as much as 100 miles from the place of his birth or had lived as many as 35 years. At this juncture, the story usually takes an abrupt turn. However, the storyteller ordinarily exclaims, this humble and despised Jesus certainly turned the tables on his enemies. The unfolding story then goes on to recount how nearly forgotten are the so-called great men who were his enemies. How fallen is the Roman empire. How dispersed are the descendants of those who had Jesus killed. And how by contrast, Jesus is loved and followed around the earth through the centuries has numbered millions of adherence, and today enjoys the prestige of being the most followed personality on the horizon of human history. His original handful of 12 disciples has swelled to a mighty army of followers, we are told. Accounts of the Emperor Constantine carrying a banner on which the cross of Christ was displayed are told along with stories of the crusades. The holy Roman empire of British empire, which officially and financially supports the church of Christ while the sun never sets on its holdings. And finally, we're told about a vast and powerful nation, called Christian America. In all of these stories, whether it is expressly stated or not, the underlying assumption is that this once obscure Jesus is now the most popular figure in the minds of living men. And whereas he wants, had to do his work with a scant dozen men, he now commands hundreds of millions of devoted followers, and the great majority of all civilized people today are Christians. This account in varying forms has been repeated over and over again by many people who perhaps were very well-meaning, but who had not carefully scrutinized the story they were telling. I am now prepared flatly to deny the truth of this. After a summer of reflection and research, I'm ready to say that this story must be radically altered in the interest of truth. In essence, the fact is that Jesus led a minority movement in Palestine and he has been leading a minority movement ever since. He is now the Lord of only a tiny percentage of the people of this earth. It is rather strange that we have held any other view than this, considering what Jesus himself is recorded, as having said on that subject. A few minutes ago, Kathy Belton

read from Matthew 7. A passage which included these words from Jesus. Hear them again, please. "Enter through the narrow gate for broad and spacious is the road which leads to perdition. And there are many people going that way. But how small is the gate, how narrow the road that leads on to life, and how few there are that find it." This does not sound like the word of a person who expected vast nations of men to hang on his every word and to leap at his beck and call. Rather, it sounds like the word of one who realized he was teaching and practicing a way of life, which was at the same time a way to life, that would require a price which only a minority would be willing to pay. The root of our intellectual confusion has been our uncritical willingness to accept too readily the profession of faith, which all and sundry have made that they and their actions are Christian. While the scriptures forbid us to judge the sincerity of our fellow man, we certainly are called upon to judge the actions of our fellow man, and of ourselves by the standards of Christ. Make no mistake about that. When we do it, we are driven to the conclusion that the lifestyle of millions of individuals and groups, which have called themselves, Christian, was certainly far from being Christian, whatever may have been in their hearts. The Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian where his actions and the spirit which he exhibited compatible with the Christ and the gospel. Well, I think not. The crusades were enterprised in the name of Jesus Christ and supposedly for his glory. But surely not a single serious student of the new Testament today would claim that the crusades made the heart of Jesus Christ glad. During the inquisition, the eyes of supposed heretics were burned out with red hot iron pokers. And it was explained that this was to advance Christianity. Well, what about the story of days of Britain's preeminence, When an established church was a part of a government which effectively dominated much of the earth? One has only to ask the colonial people who were ruled by that supposedly Christian government, whether they think it behaved like the Nazarene. But there are those who would make one last desperate effort to identify a nation of Christians by pointing to our American forebears, the founding fathers, the architects of our democracy. They were Christians, they say. The historical truth is that they did indeed stake a claim to having brought into being a nation under God, and legally in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. But they stand judged by the very faith, which they officially professed. To mention only one glaring gap between their profession and performance. I will remind you this morning that a number of the men who signed the declaration of independence, and a number of those who labored over the bill of rights were slave owners. They were for liberty and freedom, if you were white. And they were for Christianity too, as long as they could prescribe what it meant. For several years prior to the death of Samuel Miller, he maintained the thesis that we are now living in a post-Christian era. My own chief quarrel with that thesis is that it assumes there once used to be a Christian era, somewhere, sometime, somehow. Personally, I have scanned the pages of history in vain, in an effort to find one. Now, I do not intend this criticism to sound too harsh. Well, we must remind ourselves that our own conduct will be judged by the same standard we employ in judging the behavior of others. The explanation, for some of this lag in performance lies on the one hand and the fact that nearly everyone is attracted to Jesus or drawn toward him, and experiences at least a wistful longing to identify with him. But on the other hand, most people find themselves like the rich young ruler, unwilling to make the kind of total commitment that is required to be a true disciple. The result often is that an individual hears the call of Christ, make some kind of positive response, but fails to follow through in terms of the total renovation of his life. This majority mood was very well represented by a quotation from the movie star Sharon Ferrell, which was printed in Earl Wilson's column recently. When the columnist asked Sharon Ferrell, why it was that she had started going to church, considering the fact that she came from a background of non-identification with the church. She replied, "I felt the need for a little

religion." "I felt the need for a little religion." So it is that Jesus has been widely admired, selectively imitated by great masses of people. In eclectic fashion, we choose particular Christian virtues while ignoring the main thrust of the gospel. One person will choose temperance, but ignore racial brotherhood. Another will choose racial brotherhood, but reject temperance. One would die for honesty, but would kill for his own rights. Another would die for peace, who would tell a lie for a dollar. Now in all this confused tangle of conflicting profession and half-hearted performance, the name of Jesus has been painted on a vast assortment of garbage cans, with the consequence that Christ is compromised in the minds of many who are groping for the meaning of Christian faith, as far as it applies to their own lives. You see, Jesus himself, pointed to the uselessness of this when he asked the rhetorical question, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not the things which I say?" He was well aware. As Kathy read this morning that there would be many who would think this token allegiance to be sufficient discipleship and would expect to be included in the kingdom of heaven. And he warned that not everyone, "Who says unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who do it the will of my Father which is in heaven." The apostle Paul wrote to some people in Rome whose performance did not match their profession. And he said that because of this, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. The reason why this is the case, I guess, is that unwittingly, many who are younger in Christian faith, copy the actions of those whom they regard as established Christians. Now they should seek to determine the will of Christ and follow that, rather than to imitate the behavior of others who label themselves Christians. The difficulty lies in the fact that it seems it is very hard to keep from getting uptight when our acts differ from the pattern set by the great majority of those who claim to be Christian. Let me share with you an example of how it operates. And I use this illustration by permission. Last year, a Duke student came into my office, following the Christian Christmas holidays. He related how that he had been studying the teachings of Christ pertaining to war and peace. He had come to the conclusion that it would be impossible for him to be a Christian and to participate in war. He reached that conclusion he said, just a few days before he left the campus to return to his home for the Christmas holidays. During the recess period, he attended his home church. He told me that, as he sat in the service, like you're sitting in the service today, and looked at the people around him, he was unable to identify one solitary individual in that congregation who was taking a conscientious objector position with regard to war. He told me that this realization caused him to doubt very profoundly, the conclusion to which his previous diligent and prayerful study had brought him. Now, it is not my purpose in this sermon to declare that the gospel demands conscientious objection to war or that it calls for conscientious participation in war. Although both positions have been held by sincere Christians. Rather, I mentioned this example to declare that the proper course for a Christian to take is to give prayerful and diligence study, to determine what is the will of Christ, and having discovered what he intelligently believes is that will to follow it, knowing that true Christians are a minority. And that their behavior often will be at variance, not only with the majority of men in general, but even with many others who are church members and professing Christians. Now let me become very specific, quit preaching and go to meddling you know. Do not decide that something is Christian merely because you see the university chaplain do it. Do not erase your scruples against something simply because the dean of the chapel tells you that he does it. Do not let the attitudes of your religion professor determine your own attitudes, unless you have some better grounds than that for adopting them. If you believe racial prejudice is on Christian, do not let the mirror practice of it by some campus group, change your beliefs and attitude. If you are convinced that fornication and adultery are contrary to the will of Christ, do not let the mirror free-wheeling permissiveness of some self-styled

Christian who sleeps around trapped you into thinking that your new Testament study is therefore an error. Christians are a minority. Christians are a minority, and always have been from the time of Jesus, a minority. If you believe that a life of dedicated and unselfish service to the downtrodden of mankind is better than a self-centered and money-grabbing existence, do not let some preacher's complimenting of his wealthy budget supporters change your mind. In a political democracy, decisions have to be made on the basis of majority vote. There's no question about that. But when it comes to deciding what is the will of Christ, the actions of the majority can be, not always are, but can be the most misleading factor of all in your deliberation. When it comes to deciding what is the will of Christ, the actions of the majority can be the most misleading factor of all in your deliberation. The dual fallacy that Christians are somehow a majority, and that the majority of somehow Christian, is a fallacy which has done much damage. It can be corrected only by a resolute determination, the discipline oneself in following the narrow road through the small gate which leads on to life. Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we pray that we may be among those who follow the narrow road through the small gate of discipline. Not merely in order that we may be saved ourselves, but that we may be a saving element to bring many others into Thy kingdom, and into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask in his name. Amen. (organ playing light music) (choir singing in unison) (organ playing light music) (organ playing light music continues) (choir singing in unison) (organ playing light music) (choir singing "Hallelujah") (organ playing light music)

- Everything is dying, oh Lord. We returned these gifts which first Thou gave us. Remembering our Lord's death, believing in his rising, and longing to recognize his presence. Now in this place, we obey his command. We offer our gifts, we offer ourselves, to be used for the purposes of Thy love. Come risen, Lord, live in us, that we may live in you. Amen. Go forth in peace to serve your neighbor. May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you all. (choir singing in unison) (bell dingling) (organ playing light music) (tape rewinding)