

(organ music)

- Welcome to this service of worship here in Duke University Chapel on this Sunday of Reformation and here, homecoming. We welcome back all of our alumni and we welcome our visitors to this service. Today at two o'clock, the St. Francis Day service, of the blessing of the animals, which had to be postponed, will be held in front of the chapel at 2 p.m. And then at 5 p.m. today you're all invited to something that has not happened in this chapel in many, many years. A full concert on our carillon will be offered by University Carillonneur Samuel Hammond, and the public is cordially invited to this service of rededication of our newly renovated carillon and to the concert. On Thursday this week there's a discussion sponsored by the chapel of Christians and politics and many other events that we call your attention to in the bulletin. Now, let us worship. (orchestral hymn music) Stand for the greeting. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. The risen Christ is with us. (organ playing) (orchestral hymn music)

- Let us pray. Oh Lord we gather today, after we've been scattered to many places. We have come home, seeking to find something of our past, our youth, our vision, our hope. We ask your blessing presence among us. Help us celebrate the memories, the relationships, the gifts that we have received through Duke University. We pray that you will sharpen our sense of vision and purpose, guide us in your will that we may become your people gathered together for renewal and then sent into the world as your disciples, recognizable through our committed service to you and one another, in the name of Jesus Christ, who calls us home, and sends us forth as new people, amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together the prayer for elimination. Open our hearts and minds oh God, by the power of your holy spirit, so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we might hear with joy what you say to us this day, amen. This reading is from the prophet Hosea. The first of three verses from chapter 14. We return to Israel to the Lord oh God, for you have stumbled because of your inequity, take words with you and return to the Lord, say to Him, take away all guilt except that which is good and we will offer the fruit of our lips. The serious shall not save us. We will not ride upon horses. We will say no more, our God, to the work of our hands. This is the word of the Lord.

Audience: Thanks be to God.

- Today's psalm is number three, found on page 740 in the hymnal. Please stand and sing the song In Gloria responsively. (orchestral music) ♪ Oh Lord ♪ ♪ How many are my foes ♪ ♪ Many are rising against me ♪ (orchestral hymn music) ♪ But you, oh Lord, are a shield around me ♪ ♪ My glory and the lifter of my hands ♪ (orchestral music) ♪ I lie down and sleep ♪ ♪ I wake again for the Lord sustains me ♪ (orchestral music) ♪ Arise oh Lord ♪ (orchestral music) ♪ For you strike all my enemies on the cheek ♪ ♪ You'll break the teeth of the wicked ♪ (orchestral music) ♪ Oh glory be to you ♪ ♪ Creator and to Jesus Christ our savior ♪ (orchestral music) ♪ As it was ere' time began ♪ (orchestral music) You may be seated.

- This reading is from the 18th chapter of the gospel according to St, Luke, starting with the ninth verse. He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. Two men went up to the temple to pray. One a pharisee, and the other, a tax collector. The pharisee standing by himself was praying thus. God, I thank you that I am not like other people. Thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give a 10th of all my income. But the tax collector standing a far off, would not even look to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted. This is the word of the Lord.

Audience: Thanks be to God. (soft orchestral music) (soft hymnal music)

- This past week, on his return to professional basketball, Magic Johnson said, "I've been lost, "and I'm back home, "I've followed the yellow brick road "I'm back home." Our scripture today, return O Israel, to the lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity, take words with you. Return, return to the Lord. When my mother died, for the longest time thereafter I had these dreams, I had almost the same dream every night. In my dream I was back home in the house where I'd grown up. The same house which my mother had designed and built. My dreams were memorable, even startling, because I hardly ever dream and when I dream I can never remember what I dream but in these dreams of home, everything was so vivid, and specific that it was unnerving. And sometimes I would find myself in the basement of my home and I'd be dragging out the old lawn mower as I did so often as a teenager and kicking over the gas can and I would look and I would be stunned that it was the same gas can. I turned it over and in my dream it had the same dents and scratches in it. Other times in the dream I would be in the living room and I would get up from the sofa, I would go over to the bookshelves and I would take out a volume and I would open it up and leaf through it just to be sure and yes it was the same book that I remembered and there was a little pencil marks and I had made in it as a child. It was all so vivid and particular. Every night, there were these dreams. Vivid, specific, it was pleasant, but it was all very strange. My mother never appeared in these dreams. I kept thinking that she might. After all, it seemed reasonable to me that these dreams were some sort of mechanism triggered by my grief at her death. But no, the dreams were always just of me, in the house, alone. That house is still there, that house designed and built from the field rock. From countless chimneys of abandoned tenants. Houses on the farm, but my mother isn't there, nor are the books on the shelves, or the sofa. Nothing is there in that house. Nothing is there for me. I visited that house once or twice since then and I can tell you for sure, nothing is there. It's all gone. And yet the interesting to me was in my dream, home is there. Home is where the heart is, we say. About six months after my mothers death these dreams of home ceased. Now what do you make of my dreams? A way of grief's work with me, yes. But I think there was more. Perhaps my grief was a kind of catalyst, a door, opening up to a hidden room deep in the subconscious. A room called remember. Opening up deep, onto the other side of dreams door into a lost place called home. Homelessness is much on our minds these days. In a sermon after World War II, a German preacher Helman Kitike said that the saddest of all possible designations he knew was the phrase much in use then, "displaced person." Now I can tell you a sadder name is "homeless person." Our hearts are rightly ripped for those within our society who have no home, in a society where people have so much,

there are people who have no place to go. When a homeless family huddles in a vacant lot at night, do they dream as I, of home? I think they do, and when the epithet is written for our age, I believe that we should be remembered as that generation willing for vast numbers of our fellow citizens to be without home. And maybe one reason we have such a high tolerance for homelessness, and maybe one reason we don't trouble ourselves over the plight of the homeless is that many of us, more than we admit, are homeless. The novelist Walker Percy called us lost, in the cosmos. We live in a world ruled by anonymous bureaucrats who send us computerized letters addressed Dear Mr. Williamson, they explained to us dispassionately that these rules are not made for us but that they're made for everybody. We fought for equality and we got anonymity. We fought for and got the right to be treated just like everybody else. Alas, a person just like everybody else is a nobody. Technology has required us to fragment our world into smaller and smaller bites. Here in academia, reality is divided into departments. Living in different kingdoms, speaking different languages. Inhabited by people who have devoted their entire lives to knowing everything there is to know about one species of lemur, or one year in the history of Albania. Graduate school becomes a search for something small enough to write a dissertation upon. Intellect is defined as a very big dissertation on a very trivial subject. Most students find that we faculty tend to know more and more about less and less. Our modern proof wrought lives are measured out in teaspoons, said Elliot. In a world committed to being free of all commitments, fiercely intolerant of everything but tolerance. Open minded rather than well informed. No wonder we feel a drift so we cut you loose from mama and daddy as first year students in the hope that you will come to view this condition as normal. As normal, to be severed from family and neighborhood, and tradition, and story, and home, GM needs mobile workers. The modern world has managed to give us freedom and independence and autonomy but thereby made necessary bureaucracy, ruthlessness, and anonymity, we've got nowhere to even lay our head. As a modern poet writes, "on this dirty patch, "once stood a tree, "shedding it's incense on the infant corn, "it's bowels stretched forth to heaven, "brightened by the last fires of a tribe. "But they sent surveyors, and builders, "who cut that tree, planting in its place, "a huge senseless cathedral of doom." Southern mill houses, Alabama farmer shacks, Brooklyn neighborhoods, row houses in Philadelphia, Iowa farms, gingerbread Victorian porches are now parking lots, parties, we feel adrift, lost, nowhere to go, South Square Mall. What I'm saying is that homelessness has become metaphysical. Now we're not just lost in north Raleigh, but in the cosmos as well. Without a home, each of us inhabit a kind of do it yourself universe, a place patched together from whatever impressions life has made on us up to this point, held together by a thin string of consciousness, mixed with something we saw on TV last week, the wisdom of Shirley McClain, thoughts from Rolling Stones balanced by Reader's Digest, wisdom Jared built personally by us between September and October 1990 when we happened to be living in Cleveland. South Square Mall is our mind. We have removed the explanations once offered to us by religion, but we have not removed the experiences. Those baffling, confusing, threatening experiences, which made us ask for explanation in the first place. So AIDS is attributed to inadequate funding by the Bush administration, or the greed of Burr's welcome, or the breakdown of family values. The philosophical equivalent to South Square Mall. Oh it's not much for theodicy, but it's about the best we could muster having flattened the world down to our size, having burned down the ancient habitations, sold the farm sort to speak. We have vacated the temple for the mall. Now, people in the bible were convinced that it took at least 3000 years of experience to know how to build a home. Home was a gift of the ages. Not something conjured anew in each generation. Alas, most of us don't know how to construct the world, and we are frustrated or frightened by the need to do so. Home used to protect us from having to make too many

choices, choices beyond our competence. Home used to be certainty that did not have to be doubted. But alas, now most of us find ourselves fairly much on our own. Mom is with her new boyfriend. The same guy we used to hang out with in high school. And dad needs so much fortification after five that he is not to be trusted around machinery or giving advice, and you go over the river and through the woods to find grandmothers house abandoned for a condo in Palm Beach, and Jarvis is the name for a refugee camp, not a dorm. My last church was next to the synagogue in Greenville. And as was our custom, the rabbi and I would get together for coffee on Mondays. And one morning over coffee, the rabbi and I were noting the rather surprising influx of young adults, young adults coming back to the synagogue, back to the church. Young adults, traditionally the hardest group in the world for the church or the synagogue to get ahold of, what were they doing, I asked. Is this some sort of spin off from the Reagan years? Some sort of new conservatism among the youth, what's going on here? Said the rabbi to me, they are looking for their parents. Having been raised by a generation so unsure of its own values, we didn't dare pass them on to our young and now they are on a search for home, and one of my theories is that some of these students here can not understand your teachers because a majority of the Duke faculty are children of the 60s, where the main educational agenda was detachment. Breaking away, cutting loose, dropping out, tuning in to the age of Aquarius, and now we middle aged tenured radicals brunch in faculty commons and we complain about how conservative today's students are. Not perceptive enough are we to know that they are on a courageous, risky pilgrimage towards home. A search we wouldn't know how to make, since we had only one life project educationally, leaving home. I tell you the results of our home wrecking are all around us, whole whims of homelessness, threaten fragile constructions we call our lives. No wonder to hear that so many are drunk Friday through Sunday, but I'm here to tell you that a mere refuge be it daddy's bottles or momma's pills is not home. Nothing is home which can not orient us truthfully and courageously to the world. Nothing is worth returning to that doesn't give us somewhere to stand, a place from which to venture forth, return back to that home. And for something like 150 verses, the bible calls people home. A frequently used bible word is turn-return. Return is a prophetic synonym for the word repent. Return, repent, prophets like Isaiah, like Hosea, were not prepping social critics or radical social innovators. They were poets of return, the prophets are poets of return. Hear Hosea today, "return oh Israel to the lord your God, "return to the Lord." And nor is this prophetic call to return home some kind of empty nostalgia, the way back home admits Hosea is going to be hard and it will be painful because the word return means repent, for you have stumbled because of your inequities said Hosea. Say to God, take away our guilt, accept that which is good, we will offer you the fruit of our lips. Assyria is not going to save us. We will not ride upon horses. We will say no more our God to the mere work of our hands. Would you note, confession of sin leads back home. And the confession being made here is not just any old confession, it is a confession of idolatry. Confession of somehow we got lost. Confession that we trusted our defense systems and smart weapons, Assyrian war horses. Democrats, Republicans, our pension fund. You got your own idols, I got mine. Gods of our own creation, but the way home, lies, said the prophet, in letting go of false gods and relinquishing proud autonomy and return to that place that God wherein is our true source of being, our home. Our hearts are restless, homeless until they find a home in thee. The prophet Jeremiah portrays repentance, conversation, salvation, as one great big homecoming. See, he hears God say, see am I going to gather them from the farthest parts of the earth. I'm going to gather the blind, and the lame, and those with trial, and those in labor, to gather one great company, they shall return home. No matter where you've been since home, Isaiah the prophet says home is very close to you. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, like a

morning mist, return home. You see I'm betting that the reason you're here today even if you do not know it's the reason. Is that you that wants to come back home. The home you had but you left. The home that you had not, but still seek. Home, I think when you dream, you dream of homecoming, and I'm telling you, you will never be at home until you turn, until you return to God. So Jesus portrayed God as a waiting father. The father who waited at home to embrace the returning prodigal son and I'm betting that you remember that bible story even if you've forgotten every other bible story because you know in your heart of hearts that that story of the returning prodigal son to home, you know that that's your story. It's about home. (soft orchestral music) (soft hymnal music)

- The lord be with you, let us pray. Oh God, we give you thanks, that Jesus called you father and made it possible for us to become your children. Though you are as far above us as the stars and the heavens, you have chosen to come as close as our own parents. You are as a father and mother to us, and you have named us daughter and son. Even though we have strayed from you, you have called us to come back home. We do not have the words to express how grateful we are to be included in your family, for in you we learn what it means to be forgiven, and in you we learn what it means to be fully human. In you we learn what it means to be truly loved. In you we experience the fulfillment of being at home in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in life. Thank you for making us a part of your family, and for calling us home. We offer special prayers for those among us who are searching for a place to call home. For those who have come to this homecoming weekend, we ask that they may find renewed relationships, new energy to carry out their responsibilities, and a renewed vision for the future. For those who find themselves alone in the world, that they may develop meaningful, loving relationships and find relief of loneliness through the experience of community. We pray also for those among us who are far away from home, for those who are traveling, that they will have safe journeys. For those who fill our hospitals and nursing homes, that they may be healed from their illnesses and that they may find comfort through the love and care of others. We pray for those who find home an uncomfortable place to be. For those who are a part of broken families, that they might find wholeness and peace even in the midst of brokenness. For those who have estranged relationships, that they may know reconciliation. For those who have lost loved ones, that they may know comfort and the renewal of the relationship through the memories that they cherish, we pray for those who are experiencing the roller coaster of addiction, that they may find freedom from the bondage and healing from the pain, we pray for those who live in fear of violence in the home, that they may find safety and comfort. We pray also for those who have no home, for those who are homeless, that they may find not just temporary shelter, but a place to call their own home, and a way to sustain themselves and their families. We pray for those who have been driven from their homes through war or famine or apartheid. That they would find safe haven in the right and way to return to their own homes. Oh God we offer these prayers knowing that you are seeking ways to bless us even before we ask you, knowing that as we see the home and the world, you call us to return home in you. Bring us home Lord, bring us home and use us as your disciples in the world to bless on another as members together of your human family, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. God has dealt wondrously with us, how shall we respond? Let us respond as people who see and feel the plight of our sisters and brothers in the world. Let us give our resources and ourselves to God. (upbeat orchestral hymnal music) (organ music) (orchestral hymn music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (orchestral hymn music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Let us pray. Oh God we give thanks for all the many ways that you have blessed us. You have given us life and love. You have given us talents and resources. You have given us everything we need for abundant living, help us to share your abundance with our brothers and sisters. May your truth be proclaimed through our offerings, and may lives be changed as your light and love is shared and may this moment of giving be crowned with our renewed commitment to be your sons and daughters in the world, amen. Let us pray as members of God's family. 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 thy is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, amen. (organ music) (orchestral hymn music)

- Now may the grace of our lord and savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the holy spirit, be with you now and always. (orchestral hymn music)