

(choir singing indistinctly)

- Now that we have become freshly aware of God's presence in our midst and experience the wonder of his love. Let us speak honestly to Him of our deepest longings, our fears and mistakes. Let us pray. Oh God, everywhere we turn someone is making demands on our time. We spend ourselves frantically without taking time to be in touch with you or with ourselves to evaluate what is important for us to be doing people who need us are often overlooked causes which need our energy are often neglected. Opportunities for real learning are not pursued words which wound are uttered in haste or momentary irritation. In the midst of our haste, we are thirsty for your presence and assure knowledge of your health. Help us spend our time wisely and lovingly as we live and serve in your world, amen. I remind you again of the good news of our faith. God really listens when we speak to him. He accepts us and loves us as we are. He has created us for life and shown us how to be fully human. And He gives us the strength and power to begin again. Accept his gift and live with joy. And now with careful awareness of what we ask, let us pray together the Lord's prayer, 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, the power and the glory forever, amen. (soft music) (choir singing) Hear the word of God, as it is recorded in John 4:1-24. "Now the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John. Although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples. He left Judea and departed again into Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph. Jacob's well was there. And so Jesus wearied, as he walked with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, give me a drink for his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, how is it that you a Jew ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? But Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink. You would have asked him and he would have given you living water. The woman said to him, Sir, you have nothing to draw with. And the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well and drank from it himself and his sons and his cattle? Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst nor come here to draw. Jesus said to her, go call your husband and come here. The woman answered Him I have no husband. Jesus said to her, you are right in saying I have no husband for you have had five husbands and he whom you now have, is not your husband. This you said truly. The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain. And you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said to her, woman, believe me, the hour is coming. When neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, would you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know for salvation is from the Jews, but the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit. and

in truth. For such the Father seeks to worship Him. God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth." Thus ended the reading for today, amen. (choir singing) And now in joyful thanksgiving let us say what we believe. We are not alone. We live in God's world. We believe in God. Who has created and is creating. Who has come in the true man, Jesus to reconcile and make new. Who works in us and others by his spirit, we trust. He calls us to be in his church, to celebrate his presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen our church and our hope in life and death, in life beyond death. God is with us, we are not alone. We believe in God. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you. (indistinct) Let us pray. Oh God, we give thanks for this rainy day for the gift of water and all of its rhythms and beauty. We are grateful for the many signs of goodness, concern and caring exhibited by your people all over the earth. We thank you for the personal relationships, which brings strength and warmth and joy to our lives. We thank you for this time and this place where we can gather to praise you in spite of the fact that some of us are sick and facing death. Some of us are afraid. Some so depressed we aren't sure we can go on living. And some of us are so happy we don't feel we need anything at all. Help us rejoice in your presence no matter what our condition is at this moment. Father hear our prayer for all who live on this earth for people torn apart by questions and what those who ask none. For people who are so weary of fighting with systems that squeeze out life and hope that they want to quit. For people who always give and those who always take. For the desperately lonely. For families who tear at one another. And for those who constantly love and support each other. For people who have ceased to trust our government and for those who accept the responsibility to led our nation. For children who must grow and learn in our world. For those in prison. For all who are involved in revolutions. For those who are starving and for the newly handicap. Help us experience the depth of your love and make us sensitive and responsive to all the needs of our world, for in Jesus name we pray, amen. (choir singing) (indistinct) And these entire congregation to explore what it means to be the people of God. Our guest this morning is the Reverend Wilfred Bailey from the Casa View United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas. If any of you would like to have lunch with him after the service, we will be in 101 Union and you can just get a tray and come in and join us. We'll replanted.

Rev. Wilfred: One of the proofs of the greatness of passages of scripture such as the one that was read this morning is its indestructibility. Like the service of holy communion with which we do all kinds of weird and careless and absurd things. And which we do so routinely. So reading the scripture we do in such routine ways, in such strange ways, and look at it in such strange eyes with such strange eyes. That you would think it would be destroyed over a period of time, but the power, the greatness, and really the excitement of this scripture of Jesus with this moment at the well, is such a powerful thing and really such an exciting thing. Here is the story that is told to us by the gospel writer. And he tells us throughout the gospel, but when he comes near the end of the gospel, he tells us in a very definite way, why is written anything that's in this gospel? He says that, "what has been written has been done that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God." And this is very significant. "And that believing you may have life in his name." Now that's the end. There is a very strong outward statement to us. That if we read this passage of scripture that we heard this morning, without remembering that this was written by the author for one purpose, not to tell you that Jesus had fatigue like other people had fatigue and had to sit down or that he got thirsty or something about the geography of a country in which he lived or anything like this, but that everything that was written here, was written in order that the reader might know that, Jesus is the Christ. And knowing this, that our lives would be transformed, turned upside down, made new. Now if you don't hear this in this

story or the other stories that John tells us then you're not hearing the scripture. It's really, sort of revealing the way we read passages such as this. People will have guilt or sexual repression. Many times get all caught up in this woman's sex life that Jesus is talking with. Or they get somehow kind of sentimental about Jesus and his fatigue that here he's tired and began to sympathize with the fact that he had to sit down here in the heat of the day. And then he got thirsty. And isn't that wonderful that Jesus just like us got tired and got thirsty. Doesn't that just sort of identify you? John could care less. Remember he says, I have written this, so that you might believe and believing you might have life. Now this calls us to live. It calls us out of death. It's a radical kind of demand. It's not a place for sentimentality or some kind of a 20th century middle-class morality. It's a call to life. And the story obviously is about worship. It's a tremendous story. Look at the beginning of it. John, who assumes that his reader is kinda dumb and that you and I just don't pick up things too quickly, works hard to get his point across anytime he tells us anything. He's gonna tell us, first of all, he says, that this took place with a Samaritan. You don't have to go to links to be sure we get the point. You sized Jesus left Judea and departed again to Galilee and that he had to pass through Samaria. Then you say why he had to pass through Samaria? Geographically or what but we've got Samaria in here. And so he comes to a city of Samaria. And that a surprise? And he says that, there came a woman of guess where, Samaria to draw water. And then he says, the Samaritan woman in case you haven't heard so far, this is in Samaria. A Samaritan woman says to him, "how is it that you a Jew give a drink to me, a woman of Samaria?" Now you may not have heard where this story is taking place. So John says, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." And you began to get the point as you go along here. If you're careful at all that this took place in Samaria. And you missed that? Well, John wants to be sure you didn't because there's quite a bit to be said about Samaritans. You know, these are a bunch of half-breeds. They're not pure like those of us today or like the Hebrews in that time, but they had just kinda half-breeds in many ways and you got to remember this. They have a certain way of being regarded. And then also you need to remember the Samaritans because you know, this just very well might have a lot to do with where the point of the story comes. It might have a lot to do with the way Samaritans worship. Now it may be fun. It might be interesting. And it might be very satisfying to a monogamous society, especially those who have remained within the law and legally follow the customs, et cetera of our day. To talk about this woman and her husbands. But you know, if this is really about worship and if it's really about Samaria and this is the conversation, it just very well might be although we haven't any definite final way of wrapping it up, that those husbands might be about the Samaritan way of worshiping. If you ever get into the old Testament and read 2 Kings 17. You read about these five tribes in Samaria, each of which had its own god. But the truth of the matter was they really although they would not worship the God of Israel, they really never worshiped the gods they brought with them. Each tribe brought its own god, five gods and the god under whom they now proclaim the God of Israel. They really never tied in, never identified, never got with it. Now I'm not saying that's the way we got to read this story, but why not give John a little bit of credit? Why not give him a little credit of saying that the man has integrity. That when he says that he has written this that we might believe and he starts telling us a story about worship. Maybe he's really talking about worship. It may be when Jesus sits down by the well it's Jacob's well that there's going to be a reference come up after a while about how the people in Jacob's time, how Jacob and others worshiped. well, what better setting could you have? Than to sit down by this well. And what better time of day than at noon, when the sun is right over us. You ever notice how the word is proclaimed when the sun is at its high or when the proclamation is given, how often it's given from the mountain from up on high. The writers have a way of telling us you better be

listening friend because I've got something that is going to turn you upside down. This is no less than a word the word from all mighty God. Oh, what is this word? Well, it's certainly not about water. They start talking about water, but after they've talked to few versus you find out, they forget about it. They have some conversations Jesus says, you talk about the water here, give me a drink. If you would have asked him, he would have given you living water. And the woman says to him, Sir, you have nothing to draw with. And the well is deep. John's saying, hey folks, this isn't about water. When you get that living water? Are you greater than our father, Jacob? Quite sure we know you. Who gave us this well and drank from it himself and his sons and his cattle. And Jesus lets her in on a little secret. Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. The water that I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Well, it's pretty obvious the story isn't about water. It's about life. Just like, John promises us story about life. And the story comes through and its power by saying to us, what worship is really finally about is not setting a time and setting a place. Whether it's on this mountain, that they talk about, or whether it's in Jerusalem, but that when you really worship God, it will not be identified as 11 o'clock on Sunday morning in a place that has a cross sticking up on top of it. To worship God, is to worship him when he encounters us and where he encounters us. It might very well happen at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning. It very well might happen in a building called the church. You can't rule that out. But unless you and I elevate ourselves to those who can manipulate God's presence in terms of time and place, then we as creatures must say, God will meet us where he chooses to meet us. And he will meet us when he chooses to meet us. What arrogance. What an absurd kind of understanding it is. For us to try to nail God down to particular forms and manifestations and certain kinds of interpretations. Including my interpretation and the friends who have enabled me to make this interpretation of the scripture. There isn't any final kind of knowledge with which you and I can approach God. And there is no final kind of circumstance and time in which it can happen. One of the most ridiculous statements I have ever heard about the scriptures comes from one of the most popular radio preachers who said in response to some woman who had written him saying, I like the way that you interpret the scriptures. He said, madam, I appreciate your compliment. At least intended as a compliment, but I don't interpret the scriptures. I give them to you as they are. Now that is really a statement. None of us have even seen a reproduction, even a scrap, a tiny bit of an original manuscript of the scriptures. The church and its faithfulness and in its unfaithfulness and its wisdom and its ignorance. And all of these things has been that community that has transmitted and translated these scriptures through the centuries, through which you and I aren't dead. And to talk about not interpreting only God can talk in this kind of way. Certainly we interpret. We have no choice. We're human beings. We're finite. we're limited. We are conditioned. Any way we approach these scriptures or any other segment of our life is an interpretation. Trying to nail God down to a time and a place is like trying to nail Him down to a evangelist formula a certain doctrine, a final absolute set of words that one must say. A way in which one must believe, one particular way. Now we aren't God and that's a blast from us. Destructive death feeling kinda way of approaching it. What does it mean to worship almighty God? It means to devote one's life to him, to receive him and respond faithfully in every moment where ever and whenever God meets us. Lord, when did we see you? And as much as you saw me and dealt with me, yes or no, to the person who was hungry to the person in prison. To anyone in need. You encountered me, but it wasn't the 11 o'clock. It wasn't the bishops speaking. It wasn't even a moral person. How did I know? Those that worship God worship in spirit and in truth, is to know that God is constantly meeting us. We're creatures, we have to construct places. We have to name times. There's no

other way to live. There's nothing that violates the scripture by our setting 11 o'clock on Sunday morning to worship. There's nothing that violates this scripture in our coming together in a building set aside for worship to do this particular act, except when you and I begin to identify this as the only, or the primary place in which God will encounter us and in which he can be worshiped. You see, when we recognize that we are creatures, that we do need to have times, we do need to have handles. We do need to have language. We do need to have creeds. We do need to have orders and hymns and all kinds of things. Because that's who we are. But when we recognize that these are our needs and we then enter into them in the knowledge that God, yes, he may encounter us here in this church at 11 o'clock. But don't limit Him to this. Or don't put down the rest of his world as a second rate, alternate way and time in which he may speak his word to us. The word is that we can have life. That as creatures we're free to be people who talk about times and places. But to remember that God is reaching out to change our lives. To free us from the kind of narratives of branding him and branding his word and separating it and parceling it out and saying if you dress this way or you talk this way or you have this kind of habit or that kind of habit, then we know, in this century, who the Christians are. But to say, thank God that the whole world is His. And that's why we're here in this place. Paul Tilly, reminded us so well that the importance of Christianity, the religion is that it knows its own unimportance. The gospel of John, reminds us that the knowledge of the scripture can be one's undoing. If you search the scriptures in order to gain eternal life from your knowledge of those scriptures, then you're lost. The scriptures he says are vehicles. They're not to be worshiped. they're to point one to the one who does merit our worship. They are the channels through which we look out beyond. No we can't name the time and the place in which God encounters us that's for God to do. God will act as he chooses, where he chooses, when he choose. But his action is the act of transforming us, lifting us out of these narrowing destructive efforts to pin him down and to trust him except our creatureliness and trust him as the one who is in for them. As the one who is immortal. As the one who gives life. And to worship him, not only on such occasions as this but to worship him with our total lives. To worship him in spirit and in truth. Let us pray. As thou has granted unto us, oh God, a total world in which your revelation takes place. Enable us to turn loose of our idolatry. Through which we attempt to save our own lives and to receive your gift of life and transformation through your total creation in Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. (choir singing)

- Oh God we give thanks for our lives. And we ask that you help us give those lives back as freely as we give you these gifts. Help us serve at you and use us in your world, amen. (choir singing) And now go eagerly and joyfully into the world, God love. With the confidence that there is nowhere you can go and nothing you can do where he will not be present. Go in peace. (choir singing) (bell ringing) (soft music)