

(light orchestral music) (people coughing and speaking softly in an audience) (choir singing hymns in foreign language) (upbeat organ music) (choir singing hymns with organ music) (choir singing hymns in foreign language)

- Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Be seated. If we would honestly seek renewal in order to serve God, we must begin by being honest about our past and our present. Let us pray together. Oh, God, sometimes we have tried to hide from you, from one another, and even from ourselves. There have been times when we have drawn back from the right because it was a difficult, crucifying experience. Too often, we have involved ourselves in a meaningless round of activities that lead nowhere and do not bring satisfaction. We have treated persons as things and things as gods. We have strayed far from the fullness of life that you have made possible for us. Forgive us for our self-centeredness, our weakness, our living death, and give us the courage to accept the pain of complete commitment, which brings new birth and healing of our brokenness. In the name of Jesus, the Christ, who makes it possible. Amen. Beloved in Christ, by God's word, we know we are forgiven. We know that God loves us in spite of our failures. By God's grace, the future is always open to us. Let us give thanks, for God is good and God's love is everlasting. Thanks be to God, whose love creates us. Thanks be to God, whose mercy redeems us. Thanks be to God, whose grace leads us into the future. We would like to welcome you this beautiful day to the Duke University Chapel of Worship. We are glad that you are here with us and we bring a special word of greeting to entering January freshman and, perhaps, new students among the upperclassmen, at this time. The Pastoral Care and Nurture Committee of the Duke University Parish Ministry is sponsoring a reception this afternoon for January freshman. It is at two thirty in the chapel basement area and we urge all of you who are participating in the host families program, both students and host families, to be present this afternoon. You are cordially invited to attend the organ recital, here, in the chapel at five o'clock this afternoon. Our guest organist is professor Peter Williams of the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. We are most hopeful that we will be able to announce, in a short period of time, a service of worship, which will celebrate the release of the captives in Iran. Please, be tuned by radio and all university channels of communication. The service time will be posted. We are ready to go as soon as this event is possible. We are very pleased to welcome to the chapel today as our preacher, the reverend doctor, John Killinger. At present, Dr. Killinger is the senior minister at First Presbyterian Church, Lynchburg, Virginia. Prior to that appointment, Dr. Killinger was professor of preaching, worship, and literature for 15 years at the Vanderbilt Divinity School. We know him as a gifted preacher and author. We are pleased that his wife, Anne, has joined him for the service of worship today and we are most glad to have them here. We welcome Dr. Killinger and look forward to the proclaimed word that he will share with us this morning.

- Let us pray. Blessed Lord who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise here them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The Old Testament lesson is written in Deuteronomy, the 34th

chapter, beginning at the first verse. And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, all of Naphtali, land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the plain that is the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar, and the Lord said to him, this is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to your descendants. I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there. So, Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in the valley and the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor, but no man knows the place of his burial to this day. Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated, and the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plain of Moab 30 days. Then, the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended. Here ends the Old Testament lesson. The Epistle lesson is written in the second letter of Paul to the church at Corinth, the 12th chapter, beginning with the seventh verse. Paul writes, and to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak then I am strong. Here ends the Epistle lesson. (choir singing hymns in foreign language)

- Please, rise. The Holy Gospel is written in the sixth chapter of the gospel according to St. Mark, beginning at the first verse. Jesus went away from there and came to His own country and His disciples followed Him. And on the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue; and many who listened to Him were astonished, saying, where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to Him? What mighty works are wrought by His hands? Is not this the Carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? And they took offense at Him. And Jesus said to them, a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and among his own kin and in his own house. And He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them, and He marveled because of their unbelief and He went about among the villages, teaching. Here ends the Holy Gospel. (upbeat organ music) (choir singing in foreign language with organ music) The story of Moses on Mount Nebo must surely rank as one of the saddest narratives in all history. For 40 years, Moses had been leading the Israelites through the wilderness. They were not an easy people to lead. Like many of the emerging nations today, their heritage of ignorance and slavery made them almost impossible to lead. They quarreled with Moses about going forward. Many times, they wanted to turn back, preferring the slavery they had left to the hardships of the wilderness. They deserted their faith and took up the faith of new peoples along the way. They complained when there was no water. And when there was water, they complained because there was no meat. They quarreled and resisted and rebelled. And Moses, like some political cattle drover, moved them along, steadily, inch by inch, toward the land God had promised them. And then, when they were right on the verge of entering that land, after 40 years, the leadership was taken away from Moses and given to another. Moses went up into the mountain and looked out over the fertile valley where his people would settle and we can imagine that, as he stood there, there was a tear that dropped from his eyelid and coursed down his withered cheek because he was not permitted to go there himself. The bible says that Moses died on the mountain and that legend had it that someone buried him

there, some angel of the Lord, and no one knew where Moses was buried. The view from Mount Nebo - how many of us have had it? We're familiar with it, aren't we? We know what it is to have dreams, to look over into some promised land, and not to be able to enter. The pianist who won all the prizes in high school and college and then couldn't make it as a concert pianist. The writer of advertising jingles who always dreamed of writing a best selling novel and couldn't quite bring it off. The lawyer who wanted to be a senator, but lacked the money and the friends to enter the race. The actor or the actress who had all the leading parts in college and then didn't ever get a part on Broadway. The housewife who never wanted anything more in life than to be adored by her husband and who cried for four days when he told her he wanted a divorce. The husband who never dreamed of anything more than being a successful business executive and in the anger and guilt of his failure, lashed out at everything around him, including his wife and his children. Sooner or later, every one of us sees the view from Mount Nebo. Every one of us knows a dream he or she cannot enter into, experiences failure - it is part of the human drama. Even Alexander the Great, we are told, when he had conquered all of the land where he lived and when his armies had swept all the way from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, he sat down and wept because there were no more lands to conquer. We inevitably are faced with success we cannot have, victories we cannot win, mountains we cannot climb. From the time we are children, our minds become private theaters for fantasies richer than any that were ever flashed on the screens of Hollywood. Our hopes pirouette like dancers from a tale in the Arabian Nights. Our ambitions whisper in our ears with magical voices, saying, "One day all of this will be yours," and then, one day, the fantasies fail, the dreams die, the hopes no longer dance, the voices are silent, and we know we will never make it. There is a strain of popular theology abroad in our country that says nonsense to all of this, "Nonsense." "There is no such thing as failure. "If you have not reached your dreams, "it is because your dreams were too small. "Think again, it says, and think big. "Dream bigger dreams than before, "set your goals out further than you did before "and you're bound to win." I'm sure there are some people who are helped by this idea because there are some people who are only momentarily defeated, who are temporarily under some cloud of despair that blocks them from reaching their full potential. And for these persons, all that is needed is some word of encouragement to get them beyond this time of defeat and on to victory. But, the longer I live and the more experience of persons I have, the more convinced I become that this is a false philosophy for most of us. It is false because it sets as the primary goal of life the achievement of some dream, the attainment of some honor, the reaching of some sacred place. And what it does for many people is simply to delay the moment when they look in upon themselves and know themselves for who they are. It simply delays the confrontation with self that eventually will help the self to come to terms with who the self is instead of forever struggling with some self that cannot be and some reality that will not come. Later this spring, one of your speakers in this chapel will be a friend of mine whose name is Peggy Way. Peggy is one of the leading congregational churchwomen and theologians of our time. I had the opportunity of being in a conference for about 300 ministers up in western Pennsylvania with Peggy last spring and she did a fantastic job. Her bright eyes sparkled and her brown hair bobbed as she spoke and everybody listened to her with real concern because she is such an honest and real person. Peggy is a cripple. She had polio when she was 13 years old. She always dreamed of being a slender, golden-haired cheerleader. She still fantasizes about it, she says, but she couldn't enter that dream. That was her view from Mount Nebo, the promised land she could not go into because her withered leg and her twisted spine would not permit it and, besides, she was a brunette, not a blonde. Fortunately, one day, Peggy came to terms with who she was. She looked at herself and realized that she would never enter into that promised

land, that it was not for her, that it might be for somebody else and, while it had been a great fantasy, it was not for her life. Peggy, taking an assessment of herself, because she was a Christian, decided that the best thing she could do was to give whoever she was to God. It wasn't who she wanted to give him. She wanted to give him a slender, golden-haired cheerleader, but Peggy said, "God, I'm only a cripple, "and I will give myself to you such as I am. "Take me, I'm yours." And, the moment Peggy made that decision, she began to become the lovely, warm, and radiant woman she is today. I wish you could have seen her in that conference. She was magnificent. She hung her cane from the side of the lectern and she leaned across the lectern for support and she talked for an hour at a time about grace and meaning and beauty and relationship and love and everybody in the room hung on every word that she said and received it as a little treasure to be fondled and carried home. And when the conference was over, I think there weren't half a dozen people in the entire place who did not come up to Peggy and hug her and kiss her and thank her for what she had meant to their lives on that occasion. You see, I like that kind of positive thinking. I like the kind of thinking that says, "God, "I don't have to be a golden-haired cheerleader. "That isn't really necessary. "All I have to do is submit myself to you." That's real possibility thinking. Do you see how different that is from the kind of thinking that says, "You can reach any goal you want to reach "if you only have the courage and the daring to do it?" There are two differences, really. One of them has to do with reality itself. Peggy's view is more real than the other view because it knows there are certain things we always see from Mount Nebo that we can not attain in our lives. And the other thing about it is that it puts God at the center of life and not ourselves. That was the beauty and grace of the passage about Moses we heard read this morning. Moses, standing there on the mountain, looking down at that green and fertile river valley, knowing he could never bathe in those waters or taste fruits from those green fields. Moses could have felt that he had been treated unjustly by God. Moses might have said, "I believe I can make it under my own power" and tried to go on down the mountain to the promised land. But Moses didn't. Moses thought about all the patriarchs, about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and about all of those who would come after him, about the whole panorama of God's dealings with Israel. And Moses let God be God. Moses deferred to God on that occasion. That was what Peggy did. Peggy said, in essence, "I don't have to enter "the promised land I have seen. "I don't have to be a slender cheerleader. "I can let God be God in my life." There are numerous New Testament passages about this same theme. One of them is in the Epistle lesson that was read this morning from the words of St. Paul about that damnable thorn in the flesh that Paul experienced. We don't know what the thorn was. Apparently, it was well-known among the churches in Paul's day, else Paul would have specified it when he talked to the Corinthians. But Paul simply says it was a thorn in the flesh. It was a terrible agony of pain in his side, whatever it was. Somehow, we have to remember that Paul almost never prayed for anything for himself and it helps us to realize what an agony it was, that at some point, it became so painful or so embarrassing or so restrictive that Paul no longer could endure it in silence, but blurted out to God. "God, take this awful thing from me!" Three times he asked him. Finally, the word of the Lord came to Paul and said to him in some manner, "Paul, "I will not release you from your pain, "but my grace is sufficient for you. "My power is made perfect "in your weakness." Think about that. The power of God is made perfect in our weakness. If Moses, under his own power, had somehow gone on down into that fertile river valley, there would have been followers who would have thought him heroic and Promethean for doing it. But because Moses didn't, because Moses stayed on the mountain and submitted himself to God, God was exalted in the nations. If Paul had somehow been cured of his affliction, he would have seemed far more powerful, perhaps, to the people who knew him and the

people in the churches might have welcomed him as a more glorious disciple of Christ. But when he received it as he did and accepted it as the cross he must bear, people fell down and worshiped at the power of the God Paul proclaimed. There is the great difference. Paul said, "I will all the more gladly boast "of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ "may rest upon me." "For the sake of Christ," he said, "I am content "with weaknesses, hardships, insults, injuries, "persecutions, calamities - for when I am weak, "then I am strong." Somehow, Paul had discovered in Christ the paradigm for what it means to discover joy in one's limitations. Jesus had wept over the city of Jerusalem because they would not accept Him. That was his Mount Nebo. Jesus might have acted out his drama under his own power. He might have decided that he was going to become a king anyway. He could have, but instead, he submitted himself to God and in the death and his subsequent resurrection, Paul saw the core of all history's meaning. As we submit ourselves to God and discover that when we are weak we become strong, and when we are willing to die, we live. I saw two pictures once that embodied the irony of this. One was a painting of the rich fool in the bible. It depicted him standing before the great barns that were bulging with all of the harvest. You remember, he'd torn down his old barns and wanted new ones built because he had so much harvest and he said to himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods "laid up for many years. "Take thine ease. "Eat, drink, and be merry." And, the caption under this picture was: "The failure that looked like success." The other picture was a picture of Christ on the cross. The clouds behind the cross were black. The face of the one on the cross was drawn in agony. The disciples had all fled away, only the soldiers stood nearby. And the caption under this picture was: "The success that looked like failure." It's easy, isn't it, to get the captions mixed up in our lives? And to think that in order to be successful, we have to march into our promised lands with all the banners flying and all the bugles blowing. But we don't. We don't have to accomplish everything we set out to accomplish. We don't have to achieve everything we dreamed of achieving. That is not the mark of a successful life. The mark of a successful life is being able to accept your limitations and to offer them to God, saying, "God, I don't have to be a slender, "golden-haired cheerleader. "All I have to do is submit myself to you, "just as I am." Let us pray. In the words of the hymn writer: "Oh, God, just as I am, "though tossed about, "with many a conflict, many a doubt. "fightings and fears within, without. "Oh, Lamb of God, I come. "I come." Amen. (upbeat organ music) (congregation singing along with organ music)

- Let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the spirit. We trust God. He calls us to be the church, to celebrate life and its fullness, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen, our judge and our hope in life, in death, in life beyond death. God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you. (congregation responding) Let us pray. Oh, God, Eternal Spirit, grant us grace to worship You in spirit and in truth. You have so made us that the glory of our lives is not in things below us that we master, but in the divine above us that masters us. Grant us this hour, such spiritual wealth, made aware of eternal realities, lifted out of our littleness by dedication to abiding values and to Your everlasting purpose. Come now and cleanse us from our evil, our ugly egotism, our indifferent apathy, our mean ambitions, our sinful lust, that we may be ready for this kind of transforming experience. Grant to us honesty in confronting and confessing our sins, sincerity in making restitution where we have wronged others, humility in seeking Your forgiveness, and resolution by Your grace and help to amend our lives. You, Oh God, see us, a generation victorious over the hazards of war, but somehow frustrated and confused by the problems of peace. It is from a dismaying world that we come into

Your sanctuary and here we pray for an hour of spiritual insight that, with thankful hearts, we may see afresh, the light which even this darkness has not been able to put out. For the heritage of the Christian gospel, for all the saints who, from their labors, rest, for all the noble succession of prophets, for Christ, your Son, who has give us a kingdom that cannot be shaken, for living friends who renew our faith in goodness and beauty who, with integrity and love and for You and Your love, oh God, we thank you. We ask that You marshal within us, in these times, resources of the spirit that we may be able to withstand in this day and having done all to stand. Minister to us in our intimate personal needs. Oh, Spirit of the living God, walk through this place now and be the help and comfort, the inspiration and sustenance of our souls in temptation, in illness, in disappointment and depression, in defeat when we are tempted to give up, and in success when we are tempted to be proud. Oh, God, restore our souls. May we hear Your voice speaking to us, reassuring us, challenging us, summoning us to dedicated and victorious living. Hear now the unspoken prayers that rise in silence from the very deeps of our hearts and to those needs that can find no voice save for Your ear alone. Minister according to the riches of Your grace. In Christ, Jesus, our Lord, who came and lived and walked among us and who taught us to pray, saying, 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. (haunting organ music) (choir singing in foreign language) Open wide your hands, oh God, to receive these gifts of ourselves and our resources to be used in Your name through Your power. Amen. (upbeat organ music) (choir singing in foreign language) Go now with confidence in the presence of the Lord, into a world that is waiting for your spark of life and hope. (congregation speaking softly) ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (upbeat organ music) (many people in congregation speaking)