

Man: Testing testing one, two, three, four testing testing one, two, three, four. (congregation singing)

Woman: Hear these words from Jeremiah. For thus says the Lord, "When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you" says the Lord "plans for welfare and not for evil. To give you a future and a hope." "At that time," says the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel and they shall be my people." Thus says the Lord, "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness." When Israel stopped for rest, the Lord appeared to him from afar, "I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again, I will build you and you shall be built O virgin Israel. Again, you shall adorn yourself with timbrels and shall go forth in the dance of the merry makers. Again, you shall plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samaria. The planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim 'Arise and let us go to Zion, to the Lord our God.'" For thus says the Lord, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob and raise shouts for the chief of the nations. Proclaim, give praise and say, 'The Lord has saved His people, the remnant of Israel.' Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in her veil together, a great company. They shall return here, with weeping they shall come and with consolations I will lead them back. I will make them walk by brooks of water in a straight path in which they shall not stumble for I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn." "Behold the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke though I was their husband" says the Lord. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days" says the Lord. "I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people and no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brothers saying, 'Know the Lord' for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest," says the Lord. "For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." And that ends the reading from the Word. (piano playing) (congregation singing "Alleluia!") And now with Thanksgiving, let us affirm our faith.

Unison: We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the poor man Jesus to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by His spirit. We trust Him. 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 beaten at the church and at home, in life, in death, in life beyond death. God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Woman: The Lord be with you.

Unison: And also with you.

Woman: Let us pray. O God, we bring you our joy and the beauty and opportunity of this day, in friends and family who love and support us, in all that we can smell, touch, hear, see and taste. We give thanks for laughter that bubbles in us and breaks out to be shared, for friendships just beginning, for memories of persons who have become woven into the fabric of our lives, for bad times lived through, for the singing of all creation. We thank you for moments of insight, periods of struggle and growth, and for life entrusted to our care. Some of us cannot rejoice in this hour with light and singing hearts for we have experienced unbearable separation or loss that deadens our senses. Some of us are anxious or fearful for ourselves or those we love. Some are angry over ill treatment and injustice, and some of us are too exhausted to care. Yet we dare to believe that you are hope in the midst of our hopelessness. Please help us rejoice in your presence no matter what our condition is at the moment. Father hear our prayer for all the people who inhabit this earth, for government leaders and all persons in responsible positions. For those who are disillusioned and bitter, for people who can't seem to communicate with one another and find their relationships crumbling, for people who dream dreams and try to make their visions a reality, for those so crushed by circumstances of living that they have lost all hope and feeling, for those who take and crush and give no thought to the damage they do. For those who give and build and are seldom thanked, for children who do not laugh and will never be allowed to develop their potential, for all people who are never allowed to control their lives. For the sick, the handicapped, the desperately lonely, the tired who cannot stop to rest and for those who are really hungry. O God help all your people become what you created us to be and fill our lives with a strong awareness of your presence. Amen. We welcome to the pulpit today in this university service, the Reverend Milton Carruthers, Presbyterian youth university chaplain at Chapel Hill.

Reverend: The Watergate Scandal it is clear now is different, truly different, different in kind from all the scandals that have preceded it in American history. It is this difference that makes Watergate so frightening. So wrote Stewart Alsop. Mr. Alsop is noted as a conservative columnist who doesn't scare easily. "Just as the Vietnam war shattered the hope of many of us that we could be a moral example to the world in foreign affairs, even so the Watergate Scandal has shaken our confidence in our political processes. The Watergate has been an attempt to alter the very nature of the ancient American political system." concluded Mr. Alsop. Now, this is not a sermon about Watergate or Vietnam, but about hopelessness and the basis for our hope. But it is for a time like this and a people like us who have lost our way that Jeremiah's words are meant. And in our religious tradition, it is always the hope of the church that God's spirit will take these ancient words and give them new meaning and fresh vitality for those of us who have ears of faith. Jeremiah wrote to a people separated from the place of their birth, in confusion about the ideals of their nation and uncertain about which direction to take in the future. They were in exile. You and I know that there are other kinds of exiles other than those who are geographically displaced persons. Those people, like us, were spiritual exiles too and they had used up all their hope. For them the future looked like the kind described by an old man in the Western part of North Carolina who recently was talking about the future to some friends of his and is reported to have said this, "You know the future just ain't as good as it used to be." Of course they've placed their hope in themselves. The future wasn't as good as it used to be to those Jews in Babylon. So the prophet pointed them to a different kind of hope when he wrote this. 'Well, thus says the Lord, "When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place for I know the plans I have for you" says the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." 1st Jeremiah held out the hope of return. 'Well, thus says the Lord, when 70 years are

completed for Babylon, I will bring you back to this place.' And the Jews had a love for that place, Jerusalem, which colored their lives wherever they wandered and influenced and even dominated their thoughts in whatever location they were driven. It must've been a feeling somewhat like that described by William Morris in his book "North Toward Home", in which he wrote, "Mississippi may have been the only state in the union which had produced a genuine set of exiles almost in the European sense, alienated from home yet forever drawn back to it, seeking some form of personal liberty elsewhere yet obsessed with the texture and complexity of a place from which they had departed". Now the Jews in Babylon were in another kind of exile, yes, but perhaps we and they, along with Willie Morris all know what it means to be alienated from home and to long for a place where we feel at one with ourselves and with our environment. Christopher Morley once wrote, "To be deeply rooted in a place that has meaning is perhaps the best gift a child can have. If that place has beauty and a feeling of permanence," he wrote, "it may suggest to him that sense of identity with this physical earth, which is the humblest and happiest of life's intuitions". For us restless Americans who frantically move from place to place, from job to job, these words have a special poignancy. In the new culture emerging in our midst, there are signs of new appreciation for places of beauty and a fresh regard for the importance of our environment, and this can be a source of hope for us. But this return to which Jeremiah pointed is more than a journey back to a place like Jerusalem or Mississippi. The German philosopher Heidegger once wrote, "Homecoming is the return into the proximity of the source". Or to use less heavy words, to return home means not only a physical trip back to a place, but a mental journey back to those memories which have shaped our lives and which color our future. When you and I return to our birth place or a place in which we lived and love, the emotions are stirred and the soul is restored not only by what we see, but also by what we remember of memories of people we have loved and who loved us, of homes where we knew security and satisfaction, of experiences which contributed to our growth as persons. Jeremiah had this kind of homecoming in mind when as he remembered these exiles and acted as spokesman for the God who had given freedom and hope to their ancestors says this in the name of their God, 'I will gather you from the ends of the earth. You will come home weeping as you come, but I will comfort you and be your escort for I have become a father to Israel and Ephraim is my eldest son.' Jeremiah was holding out hope of a return, not only to a promised land, but also to the promised security, which was still available to the covenant people. Once again, these people, Jeremiah hoped would be at home spiritually as well as physically. I don't know about you, but I know for myself this word from the prophet is one I desperately need to hear. There are times like those ancient Jews when I myself had given up hope on this promise and can only pray, Lord, I believe help out my own belief, but then faith is not necessary if it is easy to hold. Secondly, Jeremiah held up the hope of reunion. "'At that time," says the Lord, "I will become God of all the families of Israel and they shall become my people." Listen to the word of the Lord you nations. He who scattered Israel shall gather them again and watch over them as a shepherd watches his flock.' Originally there were those 12 tribes there in the promised land, it then united under Saul and David and Solomon. And then after the death of Solomon the empire split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. These two nations existed side by side for centuries, sometimes at peace but often at war and Israel was carried away captive in 722 B.C. and Jeremiah was preaching about 150 years later just before Judah met a similar fate. And yet Jeremiah could look forward and hope to the time when the old breaks would be healed and God's people would be united again. You and I are a divided people living in the same land sometimes at peace, but often at war with each other. Vietnam and Watergate are only two of the many things that divide us and symptoms of how deep the divisions run at

home and abroad. We're divided by race, by class, by poverty and wealth, by generations and by expectations. Sometime ago, one of the editors of Time Magazine toured our country surveying what America was really like and concluded in an essay that the real polarization, the crucial struggle is not between middle America and all the rest of us, it is everywhere. It is within middle America. It is within America's heart. Our heart is divided and no one, certainly not our president has brought us together yet. And there is increasing hopelessness about the possibilities of real reunion among our people. Later there arose in Palestine a prophet who was compared with Jeremiah. His name was Jesus of Nazareth. He too dreamed of a day when all of God's people would be reunited. And He prayed to His father at the end of His life, that they may all be one as thou Father art in me and I in thee. So also may they be in us that the world may believe without it's ending. And this was a hope that we see all through His life. Expressed in another way on this occasion when he stated to His friends, "And I shall draw all men to myself, when I am lifted up from the earth." Now for those of us in the Christian tradition, there is the obligation to live as a community of hope and in our dealings with each other, both within the church and without we are acting out whatever hope or hopelessness we harbor in our hearts. A contemporary theologian has written that what we do to our brothers and sisters, especially to the least of them, we are doing to our hope because in our brothers and sisters, we are faced with the challenge of giving expression to our hope. Our actions toward them stands concretely under His judgment. The last day, he says, will not be the only judgment. It will only bring to life what we have become in the encounter with our brothers and sisters. Jesus our hope cared for all men and women, but particularly for the poor, the outcast, those who had no clue as to what life was really all about. He came to sinners that all might recognize themselves as sinners. He came to the lame, to the withered, the deaf, the blind, that in their disabilities you and I might recognize our own. That in their hope we may discover our own. This Jesus will come again and in this Jesus we claim to believe He has promised to draw all men unto Himself in a glorious reunion. This Jesus we claim to be our hope and before this Jesus we shall one day stand or so we say we hope, and then it will be revealed to us whether as a matter of fact, He has been our hope. Now it's difficult for me to believe that we Americans will experience a sense of oneness with each other much less with the Russians, with the Chinese. Hard for me to believe that we Christians shall ever be reunited with each other much less with all mankind. Yet I have to hold to this hope and work for its fulfillment. While I'm in a mood of confession, I confess that the reunion just to the Presbyterian and Reformed Family of Faith seems to me hopeless at the moment and yet I cannot give up that dream. I believe the apostle Paul was correct in his emphasis on Christian unity and that this is the basis for it. For there is one body and one spirit just as you were called to that one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all who is above all and through all and in all. I need the word of Jeremiah to encourage me in and to sustain my hope for the reunion of all of God's people. Finally, Jeremiah held out the hope of the renewal of the covenant. "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." This new covenant or agreement would not be like the old treaty which the people broke. The old covenant had failed because it depended upon the faithfulness and the obedience of the people. And when they failed, there seemed to be no hope and no future for Israel and for Judah. But Jeremiah could not believe that God was through with His people. He believed that somehow somewhere the Lord had a future and a hope for them. This new covenant would be different. It would be a law written upon the people's hearts. It would be more meaningful than a code carved on stone, for it would be engraved upon the soul of the believer. Thinking about the insistence of those in the new culture upon inner feeling and fulfillment, I recall that Jeremiah

promised that this covenant would be one we would feel in our hearts, this new covenant would not be based upon our ability to teach it to one another, or even to learn from one another. For the Lord says, "I will set my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will become their God and they shall become my people. And all of them shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest." Rich and poor, young and old, educated and uneducated all of us will be recipients of the spirit of God and it will be a part of our personality because it is a gift of God and not the achievement of men and women. And in this new covenant there will be the forgiveness of sins, which holds out the hope of community with one another and with our Creator. "For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more," says the Lord. This new covenant did not guarantee freedom from sin but it did promise the forgiveness of sins which assures the center of fellowship with God and with one another within that community of hope. Jeremiah could not have foreseen what these words would mean, but they're clear to us because Jesus must have remembered them himself when He said to His friends, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sin." And as you and I drink that cup, we acknowledge that God is still at work in us hopefully enabling us to become new persons in Christ, upon whom and upon whose heart divine law is inscribed. Now my problem with Jeremiah's word of hope is this, he doesn't seem to have any confidence in the power of the people. I still want to be able to hope that we can pull it off and bring in the kingdom and build the new Jerusalem. As a social activist, it's a blow to my pride not to have the Lord and His prophets recognize my contribution as a more significant item in the list. But Jeremiah was at the end of his rope, humanly speaking. He could see no earthly reason for hope and yet he did not lose hope because he did not lose faith in God. His nation was ruined, but he could not believe that God, the Lord who had gone through so much with this people, who had brought them to freedom, carried them through the centuries, that this Lord would desert them now. Jeremiah was willing to go against his better judgment and invest in real estate at a time when the enemy was already occupying the country and knocking at the gates of Jerusalem. And he did this because of his faith that that country had a future. Jeremiah saw no reason for hope as he surveyed the human scene, and yet he held on to hope because of his faith that with God all things are possible and so the prophet proclaimed the word of the Lord which is 'I will bring you back, not you and I, but I will bring you back and I will give you a future and a hope.' Now both the current situation and the word of Jeremiah drives me back to the foundations of our faith. If this is God's world, then it looks as if He'll have to bring in His kingdom on earth if it is to be like that in heaven. I'd like to help, I'd still like to help, but I realize that God will have to take the major responsibility. I'd really like to believe that the eternal spirit were more dependent upon you and me but if I thought that probably I'd be driven to even more depths of despair. Now, Jeremiah did not know about that baby born in Bethlehem, who is the confirmation of our hope and his, but Jeremiah could still hope because he believed in the father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. No one knows how or when, but because of Jesus you and I can hope that the God who is in Christ is preparing some event in our times, which will result in a great homecoming in which there will be a grand reunion, as the covenant is renewed, binding us to one another and to our Creator. And maybe, just maybe this is already happening in the events through which we are passing. Jeremiah challenges you and me to live by faith, to live by faith in the God with whom all things are possible and therefore we can have hope for the future. W. H. Auden in his poem "For the Time Being" calls us to undertake the journey of faith in the spirit of Christ. So make your own translation in your own experience and with your own words of the direction Auden offers us, for it leads from hopelessness to hope. "He is the way, follow Him through the land of unlikeness. You will see rare bees and have unique adventures. He is the truth. Seek Him in the

kingdom of anxiety. You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years. He is the light. Love Him in the world of the flesh. And at your marriage, all its occasions shall dance for joy." Let us pray. O Lord God Almighty drive us from our fool's hope of security apart from you into hopelessness and then and only then, help us to find hope again in your love and in Him who is the way, the truth and the light. Make us the kind of people who shall dance for joy because our hope is in your grace. For we pray in Jesus name. Amen. (piano playing) (congregation singing) (piano playing) (congregation singing "Gloria") (piano playing) (congregation singing) (piano playing) (singing continues) (piano playing) (congregation singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (singing continues) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

Woman: O God, we offer you all we can give this morning. Our time, our money, our willingness to be your people. We give thanks for all that we have been given and joyfully offer you our lives. Amen. (piano playing) (congregation singing) (piano playing) (singing continues) (piano playing)