

(uplifting organ music)

- Grace and peace to you in the name of the lord Jesus Christ and welcome to the celebration of Holy Eucharist here at Duke Chapel. We are delighted to welcome all visitors to our campus and we wish you a pleasant stay. Our preacher for this morning's service is the Reverend Dr. Hans Hillerbrand, Chairman of the Duke University department of religion and noted church historian of the Reformation period. We are delighted to welcome Dr. Hillerbrand back to this pulpit. In anticipation of a very special service which is held each year in honor of the St. Francis of Assisi feast day you are invited next Sunday afternoon at 2:00 pm to a blessing of the animals service to be held here on our chapel steps. If you are bringing an animal to this service please be in the divinity parking lot where the procession to the chapel steps will begin. Also, immediately following today's service there will be a lemonade reception hosted by the congregation at Duke Chapel held in the chapel basement lounge just below this area. Please note the remaining announcements as they are printed in your bulletins, and now will you please stand for the greeting? Create in me a clean heart, O God. (congregation answering) Open my lips, O Lord. (congregation answering) (uplifting choral music) When we gather to praise God we recognize that we have failed to be the people that God has called us to be. Therefore let us confess our sins before God and one another trusting in God's grace.

Everyone: Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ have mercy on us and forgive us that we might delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your name. Amen.

- Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive all your sins through our lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

- Let us pray the prayer for illumination.

Everyone: Open our hearts and minds, O God by the power of your Holy Spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed we may hear your message with joy this day. Amen.

- The Old Testament lesson in reading is from the book of Jeremiah. Chapter eight, verse 18 through Chapter nine, verse one. My joy is gone. Grief is upon me. My heart is sick. Hark, the cry of my poor people from afar and wide in the land. Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King not in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their images? With their foreign idols. The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt. I mourn and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people. This is the word of the lord.

- The gospel reading is from Luke. Chapter 16, verses one through 13. Then Jesus said to his disciples there was a rich man who had a steward and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property so he summoned him and said to him, what is this I hear about you? Give me an account of your stewardship because you cannot be my steward any longer. Then, the manager said to himself, what will I do now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that when I am dismissed as steward some will welcome me into their homes. So, summoning his master's debtors one by one he asked the first, how much do you owe my master? He answered a hundred measures of oil. He said to him, take your bill, sit down quickly and write 50 then he asked another, and how much do you owe? He replied, one hundred measures of wheat and he said to him, take your bill and write down 80. The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light and I tell you make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes. Whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much and whoever is dishonest in very little is dishonest also in much. If then, you have not been faithful with dishonest will, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters. For a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. This is the word of the lord. So this is the story I am to preach about and I suppose that my first comment should be in all candor to solicit your sympathy for having to preach on such a strange and even weird text and my second comment must be again in all candor that this parable puzzles me to no end. The parable reminds me of a news item in the Wallstreet Journal or of an episode on LA Law but not of a gospel story. But then again, if it were a news item in the Wallstreet Journal it would have a different ending. So the story begins with an informer, a tattle tale, who runs to the owner of a business of a company and tells the owner that his manager, probably the Chief Financial Officer, has blown it. Incompetence, fraud, embezzlement, engaging in risky deals, like the young man of Farren Spank in the far East. It's not quite clear what the accusation actually is but whatever it is, it is sufficient for the owner of the company to fire the manager. And it goes something like this, the owner calls the financial officer in and says, I'm sorry, you've blown it, you're fired. Clean out your desk by 5:00 this afternoon and I want a financial statement of the company. So that's bad news and of course a bad story and the manager begins to realize rather quickly what has happened to him. As we would say, he is in deep yogurt. Having been fired at his age there is a slim chance that he will get another job. He says to himself, I'm too old to start over again and unemployment compensation is peanuts. And so the story takes a rather interesting turn. The manager decides to get together with two of the main clients of the business to make sure that he will land on his feet. And I suspect we can all see them there at the Magnolia Grill, a corner table, one last fling on the expense account and the manager asks the first client, now tell me what do you owe our company? And the answer is we owe you for a hundred ton of West Texas crude and the manager says change that to 50 and at the second lunch the manager asks the same question and the answer is, we owe you for 100 tons of wheat and the manager responds, let's make that an even 80 and that's the story. Now there are lots of loose ends in that story. We're not told of the owner's reaction to those two power lunches at the Magnolia Grill nor are we told if the

accusations against the manager are true or not and so we don't really know if we should feel sympathy for the owner or for his Chief Financial Officer. At any rate, the manager, the Chief Financial Officer does not get a chance to defend himself against the accusations and so on the one hand he may well have been a conscientious employee who became the victim of some office intrigue. That sort of thing happens. Or maybe the manager was a scoundrel, a real scoundrel and finally was caught. That is to say he was fired but then he turns right around and does the same thing all over again. So now what are we to make of this? Above all I suggest to you that Jesus had a real sense of humor because otherwise he would not have told this story. I suspect that Jesus' audience roared with laughter about that street smart manager who outwitted the owner of the business. Remember the way we laughed a few years ago in the movie "Sting" when Paul Redford, Robert Redford and Paul Newman outwitted the Chicago gamblers or how we laughed in "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" when Michael Kane tried to outwit Steve Martin and Steve Martin tried to outwit Michael Kane and both were outwitted by a woman. We laugh because sometimes in an intriguing way we suspend our moral judgment and delight that the bad guys and gals come out ahead because at times it's fun to empathize with the scoundrels, especially if they're smart and in our story the manager is in desperate straights. We feel sorry for him because he's in a real predicament. The water is up to his nostrils but then he outwits the owner and makes sure that he lands on his feet and that of course is funny. But it's not very moral because now comes the weird part and that is that Jesus applauds and praises the manager, that scoundrel, and that part, that sentence at the very end of the parable surely is not very funny because we expect Jesus to make a defined pronouncement. To offer moral precepts, even if they at times stun us a little bit. Like the one about turning the other cheek or the one about the meek inheriting the Earth, my goodness, when did that happen the last time? One thing is clear, we surely don't expect Jesus to praise moral turpitude but so says our text, the master praised the dishonest manager for his astuteness. Maybe if we can put it that way Jesus should take a course in business ethics at the Fuqua school or one in ethical issues in the life cycle by my colleague Tom McCullah. Now, the problem of course is not with the story, it's not the story itself. I think it is quite funny, perhaps even alas and alas quite realistic but the trouble is with Jesus' stamp of approval. Cheating your boss twice in a row and then getting praised for it. Now how does that square with Christian ethics? Or to say it another way, how in the world can Jesus praise an embezzler? So I suggest to you our parable can compete for being the most obscure passage in the New Testament. Challenged perhaps only by certain passages in the book of Revelation and Luke himself must have had some problems with the story and with Jesus' commendation afterwards because he adds some explanatory verses to the end of the story but these verses confuse things rather than clarify them. For one in his explanation Luke gets focused on wealth and on money which is nice and good but which really does not seem to be at the heart of the parable and then he adds the verse, the person who can be trusted in little things can also be trusted in big things, and says Luke, we better be skeptical about the person who has faulted in small things because that person surely is not likely to be responsible when it comes to large things either. Now, that's well and good and in fact I should have preached on that verse because that would have been easy since there is so much common sense to it. The only trouble I suspect is had I done so, you would not have had to come to church to hear about it. You might as well have stayed at home particularly on a rainy day like this. Poured yourself another cup of coffee and read Ann Landers because Ann Landers, as an ardent reader of her column, I can testify to that, speaks about this sort of thing in just about every column she does not deal with sex or with in-laws. Every business operates that way and once you think about it that is indeed how we relate without being so told to other people. In short, trust governs

relationships. Last semester I had a student who stopped attending class after the first two weeks of the semester and then two weeks before finals, in the meantime he had missed a pile of assignments and was in a heap of trouble, he appeared in my office with this wonderful sentence, Dr. Hillerbrand, I want to talk to you because you are the only person on this campus with whom I feel I can be open and honest. I should have quoted Luke to him but for the purposes of this morning Luke's belaboring the obvious, that simply does not fit the parable. In fact, Luke's explanation once you think about it is the exact opposite of what the story is about. What the manager clearly did was being dishonest and what Jesus clearly did was to praise him and then come the learned New Testament scholars and their exegetical contortions trying to explain this complicated text namely why Jesus praised a scoundrel tend to remind me of a performance of the dance troupe philopolus. Now there's one explanation which has it that the manager included in the original amounts, the interest due the deferred payments, and what he did was simply reduce the debtors accounts by the amount of interest due. I'm sure you got that. He pleased his debtors, acted legally, and put his master in a good light. Wonderful action, wonderful moral. Another explanation is that the amounts included the manager's own commission which he was willing to forfeit in order to gain the client's favor. Well now, I doubt if the hearer's of Jesus' story were familiar with the intricacies of interest taking in business practices. Parables are simple stories as this one is and we should not make them complicated. Just imagine making a simple story out of the White Water affair where you need to have an advanced degree I think in real estate law to understand what went on. The eyes of most of us surely would glaze over. Actually, the story I think is very simple. Jesus commends the manager's prudence in recognizing a catastrophe and doing something about it. The manager was showing prudence in recognizing a catastrophe and then doing something about it. It sounds very simple but it's not very easy because when adversity befalls us we tend to freeze up, become paralyzed, incapable of doing anything but bewail our circumstances and we do that because we have already given up on the present and we live in the future but of course we live in the future the way we imagine it. We all tend to be true believers in Newton's revised law of gravity that the open sandwich always falls face down or what for many is the first law of the universe, that if something can go wrong, it surely will. And it goes like this, you get a C in the first test in Bonkistry or Chemistry and you conclude that it's all over for Med School. You get divorced and you conclude that your life is really over. You read about the crime rate in Durham and you conclude that's that for civilization as we have known it. You're told by your physician that you have cancer and you conclude that there is nothing to live for. You're fired, outplaced, whatever they call it these days, and you conclude that that's the end of your career. Now what all of these scenarios have in common is that they make an assumption about the future and a terribly gloomy one at that. It's called circling the wagons. To protect and to defend yourself. After all, we don't want to fight hopeless causes and the parable of the astute manager tells us that this is the wrong way to look at things and to live our lives. The parable tells us to rise to the occasion and to the challenge of adversity. Buy a bottle of champagne for a friend. Take a day off. Fly a kite on the quad. Be astute, be smart. I'm reminded of the story of a Rabbi who had a friend wanted by the police for burglary. How can that be? Said the Rabbi's disciples. And the Rabbi answered, well everyday this man teaches me something new about how God works in this world. When everyone else is asleep he is diligently at work. While others only know how to lock doors, he is wonderful knowing how to open them and where others go about their work noisily, chatting endlessly, he does his job quietly and unnoticed and the Rabbi concluded my friend is a true artist. Now the Rabbi story is as strange as is our parable but the fact of the matter is that the New Testament has a lot to say about all this. It surely was Jesus' fundamental message that the future

is God's future and that we must be open to it. We are called upon to be open to God's coming to us in the unexpected and then do something. Jesus said not to be anxious about our lives, not to be anxious about tomorrow. Jesus said let the days own trouble be sufficient for the day. He told us that worrying about the future will get us nowhere. You know it's exactly like worrying about being on an airplane because once the plane is airborne, there is nothing you can do about the plane crashing and if you're apprehensive about this sort of thing you should not have gotten on the plane in the first place. On the plane you should make plans for the future. Surely it was Jesus' fundamental message to his followers to trust in God's future. Now there's some among us who when they place themselves into God's future confuse God's future with theirs and their future is clear and simple and predictable and manageable. According to that the manager would have quietly applied for unemployment insurance and then read the help wanted ads in the Durham paper. That in short was the manager of the parable until the shoe dropped. But the New Testament tells us that we must let God direct us into the unexpected and so the parable of the astute manager tells us that doing the wrong thing at the right time might mean doing the right thing after all. It tells us that what we see in life is not always the real thing and just when we, as the manager, know that we have it all figured out, something usually happens and Jesus comes into the picture by telling us a funny story which exhorts us to embrace and accept and to live the unexpected. In fact, coming to think of it, that is not only what this story but also what the bread and the wine we are about to receive are all about. Amen.

Reverend Nancy: The lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Almighty God, who reveals grace to us even in the unexpected events of life, with gladness we give thanks for all your goodness. We bless you for the love which has created and which sustains us from day to day. We praise you for the gift of your son, our savior through whom you have revealed your will and grace. We thank you for the Holy Spirit, the comforter. For the church, for the means of grace, for the lives of all faithful and good people, and for the hope of the life to come. Help us to treasure in our hearts all that our lord has done for us and enable us to show our thankfulness by lives that are wholly given to your service. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for all who are in sorrow or need, sickness or adversity. Have mercy on those to whom death draws near. Strengthen the weary and bind up the wounds of the broken hearted. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for those burdened not by too little but by too much. For those who have so many choices they are consumed by their own desires. For those who have so much wealth that they prize possessions more than people. For those who have so much power they use others for their own gain. Unmask our false securities, O God and teach us to place our trust in you alone. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for our families with whom we live day by day. May young and old alike learn from each other by all that we do and say help us to build up the faith and confidence of those we love and when we quarrel help us to forgive quickly. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for the places where we work, that we may pursue our vocations with integrity. Teach us how to befriend those with whom we work. To be role models for those who look up to us. Especially we pray for the faculty, staff, and employees of this University. That they may be enabled to create an environment which fosters mutual respect and consideration of the needs of each individual. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for the needs of all students. Encourage those filled with self doubt.

Uplift those who are down cast. Deliver wise council to those facing difficult decisions. Comfort those who are lonely or afraid. Teach them to value that which is most important in your eyes and not simply the eyes of the world. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for the varied society's and cultures which coexist in your world. We thank you that you did not create us to love alone nor did you create us all to be alike. Especially we pray for those who seek through peaceful means to bring about reconciliation between races, cultures, and nations who are in conflict with one another. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Oh saving God, your voice intrudes upon our lives with words of truth containing both judgment and grace. Accept the fervent prayers of your people as we seek to acknowledge our human limitations and to obey your call to discipleship in the greatness of your mercy look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help. For you are gracious, oh giver of rain to the just and the unjust and to you we give glory. Amen. Christ our lord invites to his table all who love him and who seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore let us exchange with one another signs of reconciliation and love. Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and give glory to god who is in heaven. (slow organ music) (uplifting choral music) (choir singing) (inspirational organ music) (everyone singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (everyone singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ The lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

Reverend Nancy: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: Lift up to the lord.

- Let us give thanks to the lord our God (congregation speaking) Blessed are you sovereign of the ages who's strong and loving arms encompass the universe. For with your eternal word and Holy Spirit you are forever one God. Through your word you created all things and called them good and in you we live and move and have our being. When we fell into sin you did not desert us. You made covenant with your people Israel and spoke through teachers and profits. In Jesus Christ your word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and so with your people on Earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn. (uplifting organ music) ♪ Holy holy holy ♪ ♪ God of power and might ♪ (everyone singing) ♪ Hosannah in the highest ♪ Holy are you and blessed is Jesus Christ who you called Aba Father as a mother tenderly gathers her children you embraced a people as your own and filled them with longing for a peace that would last and for a justice that would never fail. In Jesus' suffering and death you took upon yourself our sin and death offered a perfect sacrifice for the sin of the whole world and destroyed the power of sin and death. You raised from the dead this same Jesus who now reigns with you in glory and poured upon us your Holy Spirit making us the people of your new covenant. On the night before meeting with death Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, take, eat, this is my body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me. When the supper was over Jesus took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples and said, drink from this all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. When the supper was over Jesus took the cup and he said in remembrance of these, your mighty acts in Jesus Christ we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy living sacrifice. In

union with Christ offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of our faith. ♪ Christ has died ♪ ♪ Christ is risen ♪
♪ Christ will come again ♪ Pour out your holy spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed
by Christ blood. As the grain and grapes once disbursed in the fields are now united on this table in bread
and wine so may we and all your people be gathered from time and place into the unity of your eternal
household and feast at your table forever. Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit
all honor and glory is yours almighty God now and forever. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ And now we are
bold to pray the prayer that Jesus has taught us.

Everyone: 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. When we break the bread is it not a means of sharing in the body of
Christ? When we give thanks over the cup is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? The gifts of God
for the people of God. (uplifting organ music) (everyone singing) (uplifting organ music) (everyone singing) ♪
Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (everyone singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (everyone singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪
Hallelujah ♪ (everyone singing) Please stand as we pray. Bountiful God, we give thanks that you have
refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for
one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen. (uplifting organ music) (everyone singing) The blessing of the God of Abraham and Sarah, the
blessing of Jesus Christ born of Mary, the blessing of the Holy Spirit who broods over us as a mother broods
over her children go with you and remain with you always. Amen. (inspirational choral music)