

(triumphant organ music)

- Oh, come, let us sing unto the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving and to make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms. (triumphant organ music) (choir singing) Let us confess our sins before God. Let us pray. Our heavenly Father, who by thy love has made us, and through thy love has kept us, and in thy love which make us perfect, we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and that we have not loved one another as Christ hath loved us. Thy light is within our souls, but our selfishness has hindered thee. We have not lived by faith. We have resisted thy Spirit. We have neglected thine inspirations. Forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and in thy Spirit direct what we shall be, that thou mayest come into the full glory of thy creation, in us and in all men, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Hear what comfortable words our savior Christ sayeth unto all that truly turned to Him. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Hear also these words of scripture. "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, oh God, thou will not despise. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let us pray together, the Unison Prayer of Confession. We called to you, Lord, out of our distress, and you answered us. You heard our voices. We said, we are cast out from your presence. How shall we again look upon your holy temple? The waters closed in over us. The deep was round about us. Yet, you brought up our life from the pit. Oh Lord, our God. When our souls fainted within us, we remembered the Lord and our prayers came to you, into your holy temple. With the voice of thanksgiving, we will sacrifice to you. Deliverance belongs to the Lord. Amen. (somber organ music) (woman singing) We are glad to welcome to the pulpit of this chapel this morning, the Reverend Brian Beck of Wesley House, Cambridge, England. This is a matter of peculiar personal pleasure to me, because I count Brian Beck a personal friend, although that is certainly one of his lesser distinctions. He was born and grew up in London, England, and attended Cambridge University, from which he holds the BA and MA degrees in Classics and Theology. He is a Methodist minister and has served churches in England. From 1962 to 1968, he was a professor on the faculty of St. Paul's United Theological College, near Nairobi in Kenya. He returned from there to England, to his present position as tutor of New Testament in Wesley House, Cambridge. He is presently in this country, attending the World Methodist Conference in Denver, Colorado. And, we're very grateful to him for taking time and expending the energy to fly out this weekend to preach at this service and to preach again tonight at 7:30 at Trinity Methodist Church in Durham. The New Testament lesson is from the Gospel according to St. John 13:1-16. (clearing throat) "Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end, and during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside His garments and girded Himself with a towel. Then, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel, with which He was girded. He came to Simon Peter, and Peter said to Him, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?' And, Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing, you

do not know now, but afterward you will understand.' Peter said to Him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.' Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands, and my head.' And, Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet. But he is clean all over, and you are clean, but not all of you,' for He knew who was to betray Him, and that was why He said, 'You are not all clean.' When He had washed their feet and taken His garments and resumed His place, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord and you are right, for so I am. If then I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.'" May God bless to our understanding this reading from His holy word. (triumphant organ music) (choir singing) The Lord be with you.

- And with thy spirit.

- Let us pray. Father in heaven, thou hast encouraged us to ask and to believe that it will be given us, to seek and to find, and to knock in the expectation of acceptance, and so we lay our cares and concerns before thee this morning. We pray especially for this university and for the community of which it is a part. Guide those who seek to generate insight and understanding, as they shortly return to their usual tasks. Grant all wisdom in the conduct of their work and in the day-to-day execution of their responsibilities, as students or as teachers or whatever. May the pursuit of learning never cease to be also the pursuit of truth and of goodness for our own generation. We also ask thy guidance and protection for this city and others like it, as its citizens face old problems with new opportunities. May all those concerned with the education of the young have courage tempered with prudence and generosity. Give those charged with special responsibility for our schools both strength and patience. Grant to all of us, who are involved with the problems thrust upon us by our time and place, persistence and forbearance. Teach us, as members of one human community, that the bearing of one another's burdens is the fulfillment of thy law. We remember now also, oh Lord, all those who are sick, or beset with personal problems or misfortune. Comfort the sick and the grief-stricken. Uphold the weak. And accompany the lonely and bring them into new community with thee and with others. These are petitions we offer in the name of Him who taught us when praying to say, 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.

- In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. The Gospel according to St. Matthew 20:25. "Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, 'You know that among the gentiles, the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No. If anyone wants to be great among you, he must be your servant. And anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.'" Do we have here a touch of sarcasm? As elsewhere in the teaching of Jesus about the rulers, we are given a picture in our minds of the puppet kings of the Roman Empire, those little rulers that the Romans used to govern parts of the near east. Men like Herod the Great and Herod Antipas. We think of them in their fine clothes, with

their luxury foods, in their marble palaces, with the crowds of time servers, with their absolute power over life and limb and property of their subjects, their ruthless cruelty. And not only kings like Herod, the Roman governors too. Among the gentiles, the rulers lord it over them and their great ones make their authority felt. But, we should miss the point of this passage. If we thought that the purpose was to attack the great, much as they might deserve it, we should miss the point if we thought that Jesus was merely making fun of the antics of the gentiles, as a typical Jew might. This is a word for the disciples. This is not to happen among you. There are great men in our world too. Dictators like King Hassan of Morocco, who can put down a rebellion by having the leaders shot and spat upon by his troops, and the whole incident broadcast over radio. There are other kinds of great men also, other kinds of dictatorship by individuals and groups. The weapons they may use may be financial power, political pressure, international connections, or just the sheer weight of numbers. There are people in our world who are asked to make decisions which affect the lives of thousands. It is not surprising if some of them should see it as an opportunity to lord it over others and make their authority felt. But again, this is a word not for the rulers, but for the disciples. And, much as it might be justified to give a discourse upon social justice and freedom, the point today is for us. This is not to happen among you. Because, in small ways, it is true of all of us. We all have in us the desire to dominate, to take away the freedom of others by making them fit our pattern. I am in my room, preparing this sermon. My children are outside, playing. And they can be very noisy. And I go out and I tell them to shut up, so that I can do what I want to do. They must fit my pattern. The neighbor, who calls over the fence because the television is on too loud. The man at the office or the committee chairman, who throws his weight about. The lady who has organized the fellowship supper for the last 20 years and done it excellently, but let no one interfere because it is her kingdom. We make our authority felt. We like to lord it over others. And, this can come in so many disguises. Even kindness can become paternalism. We give generously, and every look and gesture says, I am better than you because I am giving. You have nothing to give. Remember to be grateful. And, the church can be like this too. I don't know how it is in your country, but in my own, if the local city council introduces a controversial piece of social legislation, like as not, the church will be curiously silent, but let that council try to restrict parking around the church on Sunday morning and there will be a protest, because our rights have been threatened. Lording it over others, making our authority felt. And, against all of this, Jesus sets the ideal of the servant. Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant. This is so revolutionary that it becomes difficult to grasp. It turns all our ideas upside down. We all talk about the man at the top, the man who has gone up in the world, the man who is over others, and for Jesus, greatness lies equally with the man at the bottom, with the man who is content to play second fiddle, with the man who orders no one around, who gets no limelight, for greatness is measured not by social position, still less by power, greatness is measured by one thing only. Service. We see this not only in the teaching of Jesus, we see it in the whole pattern of His life. In His ministry of compassion. In His dealing with people. But, not just in the encounter between Jesus and individuals in His own time, but in the impact of His life in its totality upon history as a whole. As we read it in St. Matthew, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. And, what is a ransom, but an infinitely costly means of setting people free? And, the whole of the life of Jesus, His death and His resurrection are such an act of self-giving service that humanity might be delivered. And, we are here today because of this. Without Jesus, the word God would have a quite different meaning in our language. Because of Jesus, we can address God this morning as Father. Because of Jesus, we can stand up tall as people who have been cut down to size by the judgment of God and now know that they are forgiven. We are all here today because of the greatest act of

service that the world has ever known, by the one whom men called the servant. And, this is the pattern for us. Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant. But, this does not say enough. Let us, for the few moments that remain, explore what this idea of service means. Notice that this service, which we have received and which we are called to give, is service without expectation of return. How easily the idea of service becomes confused in our minds. We pick up our magazines and we read, so-and-so's car hire, at your service in every city. (scoffs) If you can afford it. We go out to a restaurant to have a meal, and at the bottom of the bill, 10% service charge. And, do you see service has become a commodity which can be bought and sold like peanuts? And, sometimes we fall for this ourselves. I think of a man who held office in the church for many years, and one day he resigned in anger because he had been out-voted on a proposal that he had put before the church council. For 15 years, I have served this church, and this is all the thanks I get. Is it for this that we give our service? That we may be paid back? That we may have influence? That we may receive our vote of thanks? When we begin a church program of social service, do we give up because people do not seem grateful or because they do not come to church? The service of Jesus was without expectation of return. To put it crudely, when Jesus went to the cross, there was no calculation about whether people would respond, no arithmetic to decide whether the cost was worth it. It needed to be done. He was called to do it. And, He left the rest in the hands of his Father. Service without expectation of return. And then, this kind of service is service to the limit. To the limit. I think of a story which I heard when first I went to Africa. A great and honored missionary, who died a few years ago, one of the great pioneers of the church, to whom the church in Africa owes much, but about whom it was said he never allowed an African to come closer than the porch. If you were a European, you were invited in and you had tea. If you were an African, he came out and spoke to you on the porch. Now, there is no point in condemning him. He was a child of his age, as we are children of our age. The point which I wish to make is simply that for this man, great as he was, there was a place at which his service came to a stop. He said, I will give this much, but no more. I will not give the sanctuary of my home to these people. And, we all do the same. We all say, I will give this and this and this, but not that. I will give my money, but not my active service. I will help another, but not to the point where it hurts. Now, don't misunderstand me. There are often good reasons why we do this, but the challenge of the Gospel is that there is always more that we can give. When we look at the service of Christ, we see service which went to the limit. We see a man who gave and gave and gave until on the cross there was nothing left to give. Service to the limit. And then, finally, this kind of Christian service is primarily the service of God. Do you remember the story in the Gospel of two brothers who had a dispute about their inheritance? One of the brothers appealed to Jesus to settle the quarrel. Here, you might think, was an opportunity for service. Jesus could arbitrate in this quarrel, and so bring peace, not only to the family, but also to the whole community, which must have been affected by it. And, Jesus refused. "Who made me a divider?" And, the implication is that Jesus is the servant of all, but he is not at the beck and call of all. He is the servant of men only because He is first the servant of God, and this determines the program which He seeks to fulfill. In this particular case, no doubt, to take these two brothers behind their quarrel, to the greed which had caused it. We need to emphasize this. Much is being said and written in these days about the church as the servant church. Rightly so. And, everything that I have said this morning endorses it. But, we need to remember that while the Christian is called to be the servant of all men, no man is his master. We serve others, but we are not to take our orders from others. In fact, service, as we are to understand it, can sometimes mean doing the opposite of what people want. It may mean speaking the truth when the truth is unwelcome. It may mean probing into uncomfortable questions that people would

prefer to avoid. You cannot, for example, be the servant of an underprivileged minority group, if at the same time you try to be the humble and obedient servant of every other kind of group. And, we can only have this freedom if we are the servants of God, and in his name the servants of our fellow men. To be a servant does not mean lying down like a doormat to be trodden on by others. When Jesus says, do not try to dominate others, he does not replace it by, let others dominate you, but by serve others. Service is not passive submission. Service is an active response to people's need. The only submission for the Christian is to God. And so, a Christian in his service always remains a free man. He makes it his business to serve others, but he does not sell them his soul. And, one of the greatest tasks of the church at the present time, as always, is to preserve her independence from state and other groups and individuals so that she may always be free to serve men in the service of God. And, if you think that this is an easy thing in today's world, remember as you read of revolution in Bolivia, the problem of the church, under attack from the right because it is too revolutionary and under attack from the left because it is not revolutionary enough. Or, think of the church in Rhodesia, trying to find the way to hold together, pressure for justice in society and striving for reconciliation. Here is the Christian's distinctive role. We heard in our lesson, how on the night when He was betrayed, according to St. John, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. The point of this story is not that it needed to be done. It was the custom to provide a servant at the door when the guests came in, and he would wash the feet. In Jewish custom too, a student would wash the feet of his teacher, and how I like to say this in any university setting, a student would wash the feet of his teacher because of the debt he owed for having taught him the law of God. But, with Jesus, the roles are reversed. Jesus does the work of the servant. And, as Jesus and as John saw, this little action sums up the Spirit and meaning of the whole of Jesus' life, and of his disciples too. "If I, the Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." In the end, the test of the Christian's life is the test of his Lord's. He has the Spirit of his Lord only in so far as he has the spirit of service. Let us pray. Father, accept this offering of mind and feeling and will. Give us the power of the Holy Spirit to renew us, and use us in the service of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. (triumphant organ music) (choir singing) (light organ music) (woman singing)