

- Duke University Chapel service of worship, August 14th 1977. (organ music) (dramatic organ music) (light organ music) (organ music) (choir music) (upbeat organ music)

- Grace to you, and peace, from God who creates us, Christ who redeems us, and the Holy Spirit who sustains us. Let us now admitting the shortcomings and failures of our lives in the company of others like us, and in the presence of a God who loves us confess our sin. Let us pray. O God, Lord of us all, help us to acknowledge our own weaknesses, our minds are darkened, and by ourselves we cannot find and know the truth. Our wills are weak, and by ourselves we cannot find and know the truth or bring to its completion that which we resolve to do. Our hearts are fickle, and by ourselves we cannot give to you the loyalty which is your due. Our steps are faltering, and by ourselves we cannot walk in your straight way. So, this day we ask you to enlighten us, to strengthen us, to guide us, that we may know you and love you and follow you all the days of our lives through Jesus Christ our redeemer, amen. There is an experience unchanging and always possible for us to know. God has loved us, is loving us, and will always love us. That is the good news that brings us forgiveness and new life. I invite you now to believe it and receive it in the name of Christ, amen. (organ music) (choir music)

- Let us hear the word of God from the Old Testament, the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter three, verses one through eight. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together. A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to rend and a time to sow. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace. The lesson from the epistles for today is from 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verses one through three and eight through 13. Paul writes if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not loved, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal, and if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not loved, I am nothing. If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not loved, I gain nothing. Love never ends, as for prophecies, they will pass away, as for tongues, they will cease, as for knowledge, it will pass away, for our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect. But when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, but when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part then I shall understand fully even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love. God always blesses the hearing of his word, amen. (organ music) With one voice 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 who 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, let us pray. O God, in this moment, and indeed in the living of our lives we accept and acknowledge your mercy and your greatness. All that you do shows us your wisdom and your love. You have made each of us in your likeness and have set us over the whole world to serve you and to love one another. But even as we disobey and break our relationship with you, O God, you do not abandon us, but you help us constantly to seek and define and to know you. You love us so very, very much that you have sent Christ among us to love us and to minister, to show us both how much you love, and to show us how we are to love. May we accept the love of Christ, may we be able to love as Christ according to others' needs and not according to our own fickle choices, according to others' hurts and not according to our feelings of the moment, according to your will and not according to our whim or fancy. Make of us, O God, lovers and carers for others in the name of Christ. O God, give to us loving hearts and lives, the kind that the world most desperately needs. Let us do loving things that surprise even us at times, let us stop daily to talk to people who need a good word, let us mend what is broken and touch those who need to be healed. Help us to be aware of our sustaining fellowship with you, and the support that we give one another and receive from one another. Help us to see others in a new way, O God, even those, and maybe especially those we think we already know. And so give to us grace, grace to live out each day as a gift from you, as we are blessed, let us also bless others, hungry, lonely, sick, imprisoned, broken, and weary. May your word and your way of love come alive in us so that there truly is something of joy and goodness and hope that we can share with others. We thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the love which he constantly shows to us. Hear us now as we pray the prayer which he has 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is kingdom and power and the glory forever, amen. May I welcome you to this service this morning. And in spite of all of the bulletins that are being used as fans, I hope it is not too uncomfortable where you are, and that God's spirit will touch and bless your life in some way in which you need this day. A couple of announcements as the last session of summer school begins and before the fall semester, as the last session of summer school ends and before the fall semester begins, we need some help, so if you're going to be here either of the next two Sundays and would like to help usher for the service of worship, please leave your name with the chapel attendant at the back. Tonight at seven o'clock, Doctor Skyler Robinson from Warren Wilson College will present us a special concert on the Benjamin and Duke Memorial Organ, the Flentrop organ, which was played for the first time last December. This is the only concert which we will be having this summer, we are pleased to have him with us this morning sharing in the playing of the organ, the Flentrop for this particular service. The service tonight begins at seven o'clock, there is no charge, we invite you to come and share in this very, very special time. The reverend Mrs Kathleen Finney, a graduate of Mount Holyoke College and Yale University Divinity School, creative liturgist, poetic writer, sensitive counselor and concerned and caring pastor, one whose ministry in a very short period of time has influenced and informed many persons on a number of college and university campuses, is our preacher for the morning. Her sermon, a vision of wholeness. We're pleased to welcome her and her husband to Duke University, to Duke Chapel, and are pleased, Katy, to have you bring God's word to us today.

- This is an awesome holy place, surrounded by such magnificence. Humbly aware of the eloquence of stained glass and music, and the power of these two most poetic passages from scripture. I wonder that any

would dare to speak additional words that can only seem pale and ordinary in comparison, but that we may know God as Lord of time and space, present in the concrete and mundane realities of each day, and even in the simple words we speak, let us pray. Almighty and ever merciful God, send thy Holy Spirit to enliven and enlighten the words that are spoken here, that they might become thy word, a word with power to liberate the oppressed and comfort the brokenhearted, even so, come Holy Spirit, amen. I would like to share some reflections this morning related to the lifestyle of faith. What I believe is an inclusive, multidimensional, and balanced life, a perspective which I believe is consistent with our affirmation that God is creator of all that exists, Lord of seasons, source of energy and movement, author of life and death. I would remind you of tensions of dialectic, of the complexity and fullness of our human experience, and of the tensions inherent in faithful living. The importance and validity of the moments of doubt which are a part of faith, the questioning and challenging of authority, reexamination and a critical view of the status quo, the irreverence with worn out ideas, which are indeed a part of our human freedom. And yet, to remind us all too that our lives are out of balance if doubt and cynicism and challenge reign in the absence of faith. Some conviction, some clarity about God and God's purposes for humankind, some joyful suspension of the doomsaying doubts and fault finding analysis, some element of belief which is naive and trusting in the best sense of the word, believing for reasons that cannot be expressed because of an experience of God which cannot be denied, even if it cannot be proved. There is not a direct mention of God in either of the passages that are our text this morning, yet I believe they are rich in theological significance, and the challenge they present to expand our understanding of God and the comprehensiveness of the life to which we are called. The Ecclesiastes passage is a panorama of life before God, pointing to God as creator, source of seasons, author of life and death, mysterious process, creating, destroying, renewing life within us and among us. In the Corinthians passage, Paul was addressing the people of Corinth, whose community was divided and disrupted by factions and petty jealousies, having just reminded the people of the diversity within the community of faith, the importance of all members of the community of every part of the body of Christ, he goes on to remind them and us of the fullness of the life to which we are called. The unity of motive and action, word and deed, that points to the full and comprehensive love of the God who insists on justice and moves with mercy, who is both hidden and revealed, inaccessible and present. Paul's words recall the splendid love of this God made known, made visible in the person of Jesus, the man from Nazareth who went fishing and played with children, walked along the road, touched lepers, visited friends, this holy man who dined with publicans and sinners, this rugged carpenter with no credentials who rebuked the scribes and pharisees for their rigidity, this free spirit who pointed to a God whose compassion and tender love are extended to all who are in need. This man who feasted and fasted, who enjoyed the fruits of life at weddings and wakes and Passover meals, and who is desolate and hungered in the wilderness. Who is surrounded by crowds who flocked to be near him, and who was left alone, who healed many and set folks free, but left others in their bondage to disease and oppressive slavery. He died, and we say he lives for us today, so we labor and wait for the kingdom he promised. We who worship this God whom he called Father, Abba, Lord, what shall we call God, we who would follow this man? Who embodied the holy, made the word the energy, the love which was God, flesh for us. I believe that our theological concepts and images for God must be equally inclusive of human experience, equally comprehensive in envisioning the mighty, expanding the categories of our minds to include the richness of our faith, and the multiplicity of ways in which we experience the divine. This magnificently varied grace of God, the invisible, intangible spirit made known in visible, concrete, and specific ways in our events and experiences. I do not suggest we abandon the image of

God as ever faithful Father welcoming prodigal folks home, but to include other images as well, strong biblical images, God as breath of life moving within us and among us, source of energy and health, river of goodness with healing in its waters, land of promise flowing with milk and honey, a mother's bountiful, merciful, and steadfast love. And we, the people who would worship such a God, are called to embody this unity to integrate mind and body and spirit, to be active in spirit filled folks moved by God, flowing with the rhythms of the spirit. But as I pondered the passages of scripture, I was struck by the discrepancy between the vision of wholeness and balance they express and the very real fragmentation and imbalance of so many of our preoccupations as individuals and as a society. Like a pendulum, we swing back and forth between extremes and lopsided emphasis. On one aspect of human life for Christian faith to the exclusion of the other, so we exalt the mind or celebrate the senses, but seldom both, we decry the sinfulness of humankind and fervently try to save souls, or we ignore the depravity altogether and celebrate how wonderfully okay we all are, and cultivate our unlimited human potential. Or we see some Christian folks totally absorbed in prayer, and others consumed completely by good works, but the two may not meet and learn from one another. It is much more difficult to experience and aspire after wholeness, the integration of mind, body, and spirit, but I believe this wholeness is the vision and the call of biblical faith. To be so in tune with God's spirit that fitting action in the world flows naturally from our communion with God, that we dance with the rhythms of life and move effectively through the seasons, so in tune are we with the inclusive and reconciling love of the creator. In the Dynamics of Faith, Paul Tillich describes the apostle Paul's understanding of the spirit as the unity of the ecstatic and the personal, of the sacramental and the moral, of the mystical and the rational, he asserts that only if Christianity is able to regain in real experience this unity of the divergent types of faith can it express its claim to answer the questions and to fulfill the dynamics of the history of faith in past and future. In dialogue with the scriptures, I would like to address a few areas where it seems to me that we are stumbling along rather than dancing with the movements of God's spirit of wholeness. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted, a time to kill and a time to heal. Can we believe a purpose for life that includes death? Our technology has created new possibilities of life and longevity and new nightmares of death, respirators, tracheotomies, incubators have been the crucial bridge of healing and regaining strength for many who were wounded, impaired, premature. But they have also meant prolonging some diseases, where folks who might have died graceful, natural deaths in nature's own wise time must suffer the abuse of medical intervention in heroic means which sustain an existence that may not be life for them in any human or relational context. Can we assist the terminally ill to die with dignity, and their families to grieve and mourn with passion and yet with hope, or will we participate in the idolatry of the medical profession, the indiscriminate worship of progress that makes prolonging life an ultimate concern? I'm similarly concerned about the extreme positions folks often take with regard to abortion, with radical feminists and liberal Christians in one armed camp, with right to lifers, fundamentalists, and many Roman Catholics in another, I worry that our polemics too often obscure rather than clarify the issue, oversimplifying the complex moral problem. I am in great sympathy with women who feel they must choose abortion to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. I believe that laws cannot eliminate abortions, and that women must have the choice of a safe and medical procedure. I have labored to protect that right, and will continue to do so. I can understand that even if they regard the potential life within them as human from conception that the individual woman must be free to make this decision, and that she may well decide for that life, or potential life, to die, as more loving than to bear an

unwanted child. And yet I am deeply disturbed at the numbers of women seeking abortions, in the hundreds thousands. I find myself disturbed when a colleague I respect as much as Will Campbell says I don't see how someone can be against capital punishment and in favor of abortion. I listen carefully when my Roman Catholic sisters say I am a feminist, but I cannot accept abortion as a responsible option for a Christian. And I am deeply concerned about whether the rights of the fathers of these potential children are being given sufficient weight in decision making. And so, I feel renewed concern to examine this agonizing dilemma, feel an ethical imperative to work for better sex education, more availability of contraception, support within communities of faith for single parents, male or female, more understanding of the married person who might choose to carry a pregnancy to term and put the child up for adoption, more protection and support for working women with children. As persons of faith, I do not believe that we can settle for simple answers, or offer only pious injunctions to act or not in a particular way. We must be present to people in the midst of that struggle, sharing that pain, raising critical questions, yet accepting and nurturing them in the choice that they make. And to confess the participation in the forces of death and destruction, asking God's mercy, believing in God's grace and that God will be with us in the midst of these dilemmas, assisting us to celebrate and praise the gracious love which is also present even in the choice to allow to die. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to weep and a time to dance, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to get and a time to lose, a time to keep and a time to cast away, a time to rend and a time to sow. The vision includes the mountains and valleys of our experience equally, absence and presence, tears and laughter, success and failure. And yet we can be so rigid and inflexible in the patterns of bonding which we honor so that the heterosexual monogamous marriage in the nuclear family become the only responsible lifestyle in the eyes of many religious people, who see endurance as of the inevitable, as better than divorce, or psychiatric cures for the homosexual as better than the freedom to love whom one pleases, so that we may be so caught up in the excess of our society's success ethic and upward mobility that we communicate to those in our church and our circle of friends that we will receive their joys, but not their pain and sorrow. That we will share their victories, but cannot be present in defeat. I do not mean to suggest an uncritical acceptance as the alternative to exclusion. For example, the gay movement is another liberation struggle with which I am deeply concerned. I believe firmly that gay relationships based on commitment and love are responsible options for Christian persons. I believe that it is an insult to biblical faith and a misrepresentation of the gospel to use scripture as a weapon to discriminate against persons on the basis of sexual preference, to deny an individual basic civil liberties because of whom they have chosen to love. And yet I agree with a lesbian sister who said gay people in the church need to be visible and vocal, because the church has a prophetic word to speak to the gay community about promiscuity and patterns of life that may be exploitive of other people. Only when we offer acceptance and understanding to folks struggling in our midst to develop lifestyles that are consistent with both their own inner voices and are congruent with Christian values of covenantal love can we be faithful to a vision of wholeness. In relationships, in community, within ourselves, there are times to keep and times to cast away, time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, intimacy and solitude, interdependence and independence are equally necessary for growth in relationships. Failure and achievement are equally important to the development of full and sensitive human beings who know how to be with all sorts of folks in all conditions of life, even as Jesus walked with disreputables and outcasts, dined with publicans and sinners, weeping and laughing with the best and the worst in the world. To everything there is a season, a time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a

time of war and a time of peace. Do we embody this vision of wholeness, or do we still need to learn that sometimes we have spoken too softly, or kept our silence inappropriately, that we have kept peace at the expense of another person's rights or our own integrity, that we have been timid or passive or lazy when we might've been strong, preferring harmony to justice, allowing racism to thrive at home or in South Africa, to fail to participate in the struggle of unions in the South. Are we strong enough, whole enough, engaged with God enough to be angry and to voice our anger in boycotts or other political means? Can we hear the anger and enter into the pain of the oppressed? And will we voice our rage on their behalf? Textile workers, prisoners, the Wilmington Ten, the unemployed, blacks, Chicanos, women, homosexuals, do we remember that there are times to speak, and times to act, sometimes in anger, sometimes at war? And do we know when we have waged enough war, fought enough battles that the price is too high and that everyone is hurting, and we need to mend our fences, to build the bridges of the common humanity we share between black and white, male and female, evangelical and liberal, Christian and Jew, poor and affluent, oppressor and oppressed, all children of God, mother and Father of all life. To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven, a time for every event in the life of human beings, a purpose, a plan which comprehends us and holds us, unifying all our experiences, all our complexity, integrating all our differences and divisions and contradictions, the brilliance of our glory, the darkness of our shadow side. According to the apostle Paul, love is the unifying circle which heals our pain and overcomes all our divisions. Without love, there is no integration. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not loved, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I am so learned and so eloquent I can charm and awe the students in my class but do not care about their integrity or respect their feelings, I might as well stumble over my much used notes from graduate school or say class dismissed. If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not loved, I am nothing. If I lead a spiritually disciplined life, if I can praise God and call upon the name of the Lord and walk so straight it seems I might walk on water but do not value those who disagree with me and cannot learn from those who live differently, then I have nothing to be proud of before God. If I give away all that I have and give my body to be burned but have not loved, it profits me nothing. If I am on all the right causes and carry my banner and boycott with the best of them but neglect my children and exploit my spouse and refrain from confessing and praising God in the process, then who I am to boast? The vision is wholeness, the journey is full of rhythms, the process is integrating, healing, reconciling of divisions, the goal, the power, the reason, is God. God, the river of life, the burning bush, living water, breath of life, indwelling spirit, wisdom, mother of all the living, watcher of sparrows and lilies, and each one of us. I do not know all the ways in which we find this balance or this rhythm, but I am persuaded that it has to begin with communities of faith who will seek this wholeness, and who will dare to be committed to God and to one another in a way that holds us accountable for the fullness of the vision, that will remind us both of sin and grace, of the miserable pettiness and cowardness and hatefulness of men and women, and the magnificently varied and powerful grace of beauty and courage and creativity within the human spirit. Who will know that sin is sometimes selfish and sometimes the negation of self, that we fall short of the mark both through omission and commission, by failing to do those things which we ought to do, and by doing those things which we ought not to do, and who will assist us in trying to know the difference. The need for our communities of faith that will be both spiritually disciplined and morally passionate, to be active in God's causes of justice and peace, and faithful to the injunction to worship and praise God and fellowship with one another. To be silent before God and outspoken before the powers and principalities, to labor on

behalf of the kingdom, and to rest in the conviction that God's will can be done. If we can work together towards this vision, then perhaps we will be so attuned to God and the stirring of God's spirit within us that we can flow with the times and the seasons, and the sensitive love that will precede the rhythms and embody the balanced movement of a people to praise the living God. I would like to close by sharing an experience I had recently which seemed to embody to me this kind of unity and integration. Friday I went to the funeral of Leon Lajune Smith. Leon was identified to me as a black employee of Hollins College, where I recently assumed the position of Chaplain. He was a cook in the dining hall, I was told, a young man who had died of cancer rather quickly and surprisingly. But as I entered the little Hollins Baptist Church, the church that serves the community of black people, predominantly college employees who live behind the college, I began to see a different Leon Smith, and a different view of his death. People were singing there's plenty of good room in my Father's kingdom, choose your seat and sit down. Folks were sobbing and tapping their feet with fans waving and ushers moving efficaciously through the room to give assistance to the mourners that were especially distraught, wiping their tear streaked faces and fanning them with pieces of cardboard with the face of Martin Luther King imprinted on one side. Then they began to speak about Leon and his faith. Reverend Hall had visited him about the time of the original diagnosis, brother Leon told him about the treatments the doctor would administer. As Reverend Hall tells it, Leon smiled and said well, if the treatment works, that's great, if they don't, that's okay too, I'm ready to go whenever the Lord calls me. And then Reverend Keaton told us about Leon, not a cook, not a menial employee, not a servant to an elitist educational institution, but the Leon Smith those people knew, a singer, a choir master, the organist, a mountain climber in the world of music, the preacher called him. When Reverend Keaton began the eulogy he turned to the choir and said brothers and sisters, you're the real eulogy for Leon Smith. If you don't sing with all the energy and beauty God gave you, then you're messing up the eulogy. If you don't get along with one another, with each member of the choir even though you're hear to praise God, then I tell you, my friends, you're messing up the eulogy. I didn't know the man, but that funeral service spoke to me in a way that was both scary and inspiring. Here were a people who were a community, they labored together and they worshiped together, they sang and danced before God, their bodies moved as they prayed and preached, they mourned fully, crying copious tears, men and women, but they were not afraid of death. They knew that there was a time to be born and a time to die, a time for healing and a time for release from all the sickness and sadness of this life. Reverend Keaton said that Leon knew that he had only one more mountain to climb, and one more river to cross. They could mourn, they could grieve, they could lament shamelessly because they had heard and believed the word of God's promise, I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. They knew that Leon had been with God in life, and would be united with God in death, even as I silently confessed my difficulty with their literal images of mansions with many rooms and the melodious sounds of the heavenly chorus, I knew that they had comprehended the loving purposes of God in a way I could only hope for. I do not understand the mystery, I cannot comprehend the purposes of God, I have no clear understanding of how we shall be united, even in death, held and loved by the God who created us, but I believe the promise that Paul sets before us, for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, for now we know in part, later we shall understand fully, even as we have been fully understood, thanks be to God, amen. (organ music) (light organ music) (choir music) (organ music)

- O God, through Christ our Lord you give us all the gifts necessary to life. Accept now these symbols of the gifts of our lives to you, fill them with life and goodness, bless them and make them holy, and now may all

honor and glory be yours through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. (organ music)

- Will you join with me now in this responsive litany of hope for the future? We believe that God never gives up on us, we believe that Jesus was God in human form who's showed us the astounding steadfastness of God's love for us. We know that God's love continues and continues and continues. We are a people of koinonia. We are the sons and daughters of God. We believe that's God love is something that will never give up on us, and so we approach the future with confidence through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven, a time to hate and a time to love, a time for war and a time for peace, so too there is a time for movement into new places, new experiences, and new moments. Go now into the world and respond to the love of Christ in all that you do. May God's mercy, grace, and peace be with you, and may you be channels of Christ's grace, mercy, and peace. (choir music)
(dramatic organ music)