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- Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the Gospel lesson. The Gospel lesson is from the 20th of John, verses 19 through 31. "On the evening of that day, "the first day of the week, "the doors being shut where the disciples were "for fear of the Jews, "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "peace be with you. "When he had said this, "he showed them his hands and his side. "Then the disciples were glad "when they saw the Lord. "Jesus said to them again, "peace be with you. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you "and when he had said this, "he breathed on them "and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. "If you forgive the sins of any, "they are forgiven. "If you retain the sins of any, they are retained. "Now, Thomas, one of the 12, "called the twin was not with them when Jesus came, "so the other disciples told him, "we have seen the Lord "but he said to them, "unless I see his hands "and the print of the nails "and place my finger in the mark of the nails "and place my hand in his side, "I will not believe. "Eight days later, "his disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. "The doors were shut "but Jesus came and stood among them "and said, peace be with you. "Then he said to Thomas, "put your finger here and see my hands "and put your hand and place it in my side. "Do not be faithless but believing. "Thomas answered him, "my Lord, and my God. "Jesus said to him, "have you believed because you have seen me? "Blessed are those who have not seen "and yet believed. "Now, Jesus did many other signs "in the presence of the disciples "which are not written in this book." here ends the reading from the Gospel. All praise and glory be to God. Amen. (lively organ music) (congregation singing)

- Be seated, please. In the name of the Lord our God, who is creator, redeemer and comforter. Amen. John, the man who wrote the book of Revelation must have been a distinctively good man. Apparently, he had taken good care of himself physically for he had lived to a ripe old age, at least a ripe old age for his own day and time. He had become a deeply devout follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had deep personal convictions about who Christ was and what following the lordship of Christ was to mean to his brothers and sisters in Christ. It was precisely this commitment to witness and his own witnessing that had gotten him in prison where he was. He tells us, "I was put on the island named Patmos "because I had proclaimed God's word "and the truth that Jesus revealed." That's all he had done. "I had proclaimed God's word "and the truth that Jesus revealed." That's all. But that was enough to get him put in prison. He was a good man because of his love and concern for others. One reading through the book of Revelation is convinced is that he had a deep and genuine and abiding love for others. His vision on Patmos and the writing of the book of Revelation, he tells us at the beginning were given him by God for him to show God's servants, and God's children what must happen very soon. It is as if he and the writer of I John are of one mind and one spirit. The writer of I John says, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech "but in deed and in truth. "Beloved, let us love one another "for love is of God. "And those who love are born of God and know God. "If we love one another, "God abides in us and God's love is perfected in us." Or as John Powell writes in his

little book on prayer entitled "He Touched Me," "Wherever I have seen love, "I have seen and felt the presence of God. "God present and alive and active "in the hearts and lives and spirits of people." John who wrote Revelation was a good man, a caring man, a man of faith, one who spoke with authority, one whose word would have meaning and validity for those to whom he was writing. So that if he gave a word of correction, it would be taken seriously. If he gave a word of encouragement, then it would be received gratefully and gladly so that when John says, "I, John, share with you in union with Jesus your suffering, "his kingdom and in enduring," I believe that that word was received with an open mind and spirit and was received with deep gratitude. It seems to me then highly appropriate that we have a word from this good man on this last closing Sunday of this academic year. Thus the epistle lesson for this second Sunday after Easter is from Revelation, the first chapter. Another academic year over and finished. Well, for some of you, almost over and finished anyhow. It hardly seems possible and yet it is. As together we look back on the past eight months, at first it appears that time has gone by very, very quickly and then upon reflection, much has happened, and the time indeed, has been very, very full. I have never understood why it is that the older you get, the faster time seems to go by but it does seem that way, doesn't it? Guy Murchie in his book "The Seven Mysteries of Life" in a section entitled Transcendence, gives a suggestion as to why this may be so. He writes, "Have you ever wondered why each year you live, "seems to pass faster than the year before? "There's a law at work here called transcendence. "Influencing time and space and consciousness of self, "for each year lived "has to be a smaller portion "of one's experience to date. "To the year-old baby, "a year is a lifetime. "To the 10-year-old, "1/10 as much. "To the centenarian, "but 1% of his experience "while people he knows appear, bloom and die "like flowers in a garden. So it is for the one-year-old, a year is all of that one-year-old's life for the 10-year-old, it is 1/10 but for the person who has 100, it is 1/100. So for those of us who are somewhere in between, it is easy to see on reflecting that way that time indeed, does seem to go faster as we get older and so the year we are finishing has gone more quickly for all of us than any other year in our lives because it is a smaller portion of our lives than any other year has ever been. A heavy year for some. A year of joy and sadness. A time of goodness and of grief. Of celebration and heartache. Of work accomplished and of work undone. Of work done well and work done poorly. Of goals realized and of goals never to be realized. And we live with that ambiguity of goals realized and goals never to be realized all of our lives, don't we? Of loves known and of loves never to know again. Of loves remembered and of loves newly discovered. Of new awarenesses of self, of others, of the world, indeed, of the pain and suffering and risk and danger and threat and insecurity and unknowns and unknowable and fears and possibilities all around us. New awarenesses which we have and we cannot absolutely cannot go back to a former state of naivete or innocence or even ignorance. We know now as we have never known before and we cannot return, this must have been at least part of what Thomas Wilk intended for we can go home again physically but intellectually, mentally, even emotionally, we cannot go home again from new awarenesses that have become ours this year. My prayer is that this has been a good year for you at this place. That you have become more and more the person that you want and God wants you to become. That you have a new sense of wholeness and integrity and authenticity that is real and helpful to you. And that your love for self and for others and for God has become more tender, more true and more genuine. John writes, "I am John, your brother "and in union with Jesus, "I share with you in suffering in his kingdom "and in enduring." Translated I believe that word is applicable and appropriate to each of us for there are those to whom you can say that word. Indeed, you may well be saying it just now to someone or to several someones very special. I am Bill or Mary, your brother or sister and in union in Christ, whoever it is you are having that

union, I share with you in suffering in his kingdom and in enduring. And my friends, listen, will you this morning for I believe that also there are some who would want to say that word to you. They're saying I, Joe, or Anne, I am your brother or your sister and as they reach out to you or to me in spirit, they say in union with Jesus, I want this morning to share with you in your suffering, in his kingdom, and in enduring so that wherever you go, whatever you do, succeed, fail, live, die, grow, stagnate, give, receive, hurting or happy, whatever comes your way, there are some this day and in the days to come who will share with you and with me in life and in living. Henri Nouwen in his book "Reaching Out," describes one of the most beautiful experiences between two human beings I think I've ever read about. He says, "There are happy moments of direct knowing, "affirming our hopes "and encouraging us in our search "for that deep solitude "where we can sense an inner unity "and live in union with our fellow human beings "and with God." He then tells about an experience where a former student comes back to visit with him. The student walked into his office and sat down and said, "I have no problems this time." I'm sure a lot of professors would like to hear these words at the beginning of a conversation. He said, "I have no problems this time. "No questions to ask you. "I do not need counsel or advice "but I simply want to celebrate some time with you." And they talked and celebrated time for a long while. And after some deep and obviously real sharing, Nouwen writes of what then happened. The student then said, "It is good to be here." And I said, "Yes, it is good to be together again." And after that he writes, "We were silent again for a long period and as a deep peace filled the empty space between us, he said hesitantly, "When I look at you, it is as if I am in the presence of Christ." I did not feel startled or surprised or in need of protesting, but I could only say back to him, "it is the Christ in you "who recognizes the Christ in me." "Yes," he said, "Christ is indeed in our midst." "And then he spoke the words," Nouwen writes, "which entered my soul as the most healing words "I had heard in many years," the student said to him, "From now on, wherever you go "or wherever I go, "all the ground between us "will be holy ground." There are many today, teacher, professor, roommate, confidante, counselor, listener, sharer, lover, friend, who say to you and to me, "From now on, my brother or sister, "wherever you go and wherever I go, "all the ground between us will be holy ground." The ground is holy as John reminds us because we share it in union with Christ. As Paul tells us, "I am persuaded that neither death "nor life nor angels nor principalities "nor things present nor things to come "nor powers nor height nor depth "nor anything else in all creation "will be able to separate us from the love of God "in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing, absolutely nothing ever to separate us from the love of God which we experience in Christ Jesus our Lord and I believe nothing shall ever separate us from those with whom we share life. "I, John, in union with Jesus, "share with you in suffering, "in his kingdom and in enduring." Some contemporary professors of preaching may think that they were the first ones who developed the idea of three points, make a good sermon or three points and a poem as someone has said. But running from beginning to end in John's writing is the fact that he constantly speaks in terms of threes. In the first chapter, he says, "Happy is the one who reads this book, "who listens to the words, "and who obeys these words." And then he writes about Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the Earth. Or he talks about the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come. So he speaks in threes and first, he talks about I share with you in suffering. We do suffer. All of us do. Each of us does. The early Christians did. John knew this. He had suffered. He was persecuted, arrested, imprisoned, exiled. His brothers and sisters in Christ were suffering at the same time as he. He knew this. They were all μάρτυρες (Greek) or martyrs for their faith in Christ. This did not mean that they were all martyrs, that is that they were all killed for their faith and their proclaiming of God's word but they were μάρτυρες (Greek), that is martyrs in that they were suffering, they were

witnessing for the lordship of Christ and John knew this. I don't know how it is with you but for me, it is most reassuring, it is extremely crucial, it is absolutely essential and sometimes for me, it is, it has been and is a life-saving experience to know that someone is with me in my suffering. This is why people go to the hospital. This why people go to the home when someone has died. This is why some friend comes to your room when you are broken or in tears or are down. This is why we write notes or send cards or make phone calls. Not that we can make people well, not that we can take away someone else's pain, not that there is anything that we can do but that out of love and genuine concern and with real empathy, we can say I am with you. In your joy, I rejoice. In your sadness, I suffer. "I share with you," John writes, "in his kingdom." The kingdom had already come, the kingdom was already present, the kingdom of Christ of God was and is the rule of God, the reign of God, the presence of God, the love of God. Jesus, indeed, came preaching in the very first sermon. He preached the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news. John has shared and is sharing with his fellow Christians in that kingdom. For kingdom, it seems to me, is a sense of presence. "Lo, I will be with you always "even to the end of the age." Kingdom is a sense of obligation. "If you love me," Jesus said, "then keep my commandments." Kingdom is a sense of demand. "For as much as you have not done it "under one of the least "of these, you have not done it unto me "or for as much as you have done it unto one "of the the least "of these, you have done it unto me." Kingdom is a sense of love. See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God. Kingdom is a sense of covenant. "I will never leave you," Jesus said, "nor forsake you. "I will come to you "and because I live, you will live also." Kingdom is promise. "Greater works," Jesus said, "than I do, you also will do." And then John, near the end of the book of Revelation writes, "And I saw the holy city coming down out "of Heaven from God. "Now," he says, "God's home is with God's people. "God will live with them and they shall be his people. "God himself will be with them "and he will be their God. "He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. "There will be no more death, "no more grief, no more crying or pain. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, "the beginning and the end." And then he says, "To anyone, "anyone who is thirsty, "I will give a free drink of water "from the spring of the water of life. "To anyone, a free drink of water. "Yes," John says, "I share with you in his kingdom" and then he says, "I share with you in enduring, "in suffering in his kingdom and in enduring." It is not enough to start with someone on a journey. It is not enough just to walk part of the way. It is not enough just to come and go in relating to others. It is not enough to make a commitment and not follow through. The word John gave to his brothers and sisters in Christ, the word that the Lord gives to us, the word that we are to receive and are to live out with others is I share with you in enduring. Those who endure to the end, the same shall be saved. We're all in this business together. If we can live it, share it, endure it with one another and in union with Jesus, then surely God's will and God's way are being fulfilled in us and through us. I believe that we have occasion every day to share in suffering and in the kingdom of God and in enduring. It isn't something that's very special but it is something for every day. And so as we close this academic year, may I invite you, you who are a part of this community in an ongoing way, you who are students and will be leaving either for other places or temporarily for the summer to return next fall, you who are visiting this day, may I invite you this morning to do two things? One, will you allow others the privilege and the joy and the happiness and the satisfaction of coming to your life to share with you in your experiences of suffering of the kingdom of God and of enduring? Will you let somebody else come to you? The second invitation is will you not live your life alone only for yourself, only to receive? But will you, in the name and in the spirit of Christ, and in union with Jesus, reach out to share with others as they experience suffering in the kingdom and as they need someone to help them in enduring? I close with these words.

Every human being has a great, yet often unknown gift to care, to be compassionate, to become present to the other, to listen, to hear and to receive. If that gift would be set free and made available, miracles could take place. Those who rarely can receive bread from a stranger and smile in gratitude can feed many without even realizing it. Those who can sit in silence with their fellow man not knowing what to say but knowing that they should be there, can bring new life to a dying heart. Those who are not afraid to hold a hand in gratitude or to shed tears in grief or to let a sigh of distress arise straight from the heart can break through paralyzing boundaries and witness the birth of a new fellowship, the fellowship of the broken. Why is it that we keep that great gift of care so deeply hidden within us? Why is it that we keep giving dimes without daring to look into the face of the beggar? Why is it that we do not join the lonely eater in the dining hall but look for those whom we know so well? Why is that we so seldom knock on a door or grab a phone just to say hello, just to show that we have been thinking about each other? Why are smiles still hard to get and words of comfort so difficult to come by? Why is it so hard to express thanks to a teacher, admiration to a student and appreciation to the men and women who cook and clean and garden? Why? Why do we keep bypassing each other, always on the way to something or someone more important? Why is it that we pass others by, always on the way to something or someone more important? We need not pass others. We need simply say and live as John did. "I, in union with Jesus, "share with you in your suffering, "in his kingdom and in enduring." And my friends in Christ, may the peace and the love of God be with you this day and in the days to come. Amen. (lively organ music) ♪ I know my redeemer lives ♪ ♪ What joy this sweet sentence gives ♪ ♪ He lives, He lives, who once was dead ♪ ♪ He lives, my everliving Head ♪ (congregation singing) ♪ I know that my Redeemer lives ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- 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.

- And with you also.

- Let us pray. Most merciful and loving God, we are grateful for the opportunity within this community to reaffirm our faith in you. We acknowledge your unique revelation of yourself in your Son, Jesus Christ and praise your name for our being among those who have heard that message of your love and salvation offered through him. We accept that most gratefully, oh God as a gift from you and know that you call us to walk in his steps as he walked. May we know the experience as did he of close and personal communication with you. May we know with assurance that we can come to you with our joys, our disappointments, even our failures sure that you hear us, love us and accept us. And sometimes when we cannot find you, oh God, may we remember that even your Son cried out in search for you and found silence. But you were still there and are today, even when we doubt and fear and you will reveal yourself to us again. We know the

importance of fellowship with your people, loving God. As Jesus gathered his disciples around him for support and friendship, may we also experience the gift of friendship, of caring for each other, of sharing joys and successes and knowing too that we can share our disappointments and failures, not only with you but also with friends, your people who care and sustain us. We thank you for that sustaining fellowship that you made us to be a people of community. Open us so that we can give ourselves to that community. May we know how truly to be priests to one another, sharing our gifts, accepting the gifts of others, celebrating and grieving together. And then, oh God, when we have learned to trust your love and accept the fellowship of your people, may we hear your call to reach out, to proclaim your saving love, to be faithful to the example of your son Jesus. He shared your love with the wealthy and the oppressed, with the religious and the social outcast. He ministered to the physical and spiritual needs of others. He compelled no one to obey yet he invited all to participate in God's kingdom. May we be so open, oh God. And once we have accepted your invitation, teach us that it is our responsibility to serve, not simply some choice that you give us. And give us the strength then to be your servants in this world. We pray for the community of believers that we may be faithful and we pray for all who are also precious to you but have not knowingly experienced your love. Some have never heard, oh God, some are too hungry or sick or disheartened to hear and some simply do not want to hear or find the call too difficult. Send us to them, oh God and make your love known to them through your people. These things we ask in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray.

- 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 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. (tranquil organ music) (lively organ music) ♪ Great is the home of the Lord ♪ (choir singing) (lively organ music) (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Oh most loving and merciful God, every day we experience your goodness. We thank you for your abundant blessings to us and in gratitude now, we bring these gifts and dedicate them to you. We also dedicate our lives anew to you. Use them in your service to spread your love and justice throughout this world. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen. (dramatic organ music) (congregation singing) May we go from this place renewed by this time of worship, secure in God's loved filled with God's peace and eager to do God's will. Amen.

- Amen. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (lively organ music)