

- Duke University Chapel service of worship; July 24th, 1977. (gentle instrumental music) (choir sings)
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- We are not God, we act as though we were. Let us confess our sin to the one who is. Oh, Lord, our God, even as we sing your praises here, we realize how reluctant we are to sing them in the world. And yet, even then, we too often sing empty praises with our lips, but not our lives. Though we want to deserve the love of other persons, we hesitate to risk loving them without assurances. Though we want to feel needed, we are afraid to admit our own need for you and for others. Though we want above all, to escape from being alone, we shrink even more from being known as we are. Free us, oh, God, from the fears that bring alienation, worse than aloneness, and open us to the fullness of life that comes only to those who face it unafraid, amen. We have confessed our fear. Let us now accept our assurance from the Psalms. Let me hear what the Lord God will speak, for God will speak peace to the people, to the saints, to those who turn to the Lord in their hearts. Surely, salvation is at hand for those who fear the Lord, that glory may well in our land. (gentle instrumental music) (choir sings) Our first reading comes from Judges 7, beginning with verse two: The Lord said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me "to give the Midianites into their hands. "Let Israel (indistinct) themselves against me, "saying, my own hand delivered me. "Now, therefore, proclaim in the ears of the people saying, "Whoever is fearful and trembling, "let him return home." And Gideon tested them. 22,000 returned, 10,000 remained. And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. "Take them down to the water "and I will test them for you there." "And he, of whom I say to you, "This man shall go with you," shall go with you. "And any of whom I say to you, "This man shall not go with you," shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water and the Lord said to Gideon, "Everyone that laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, "you shall set by himself. "Likewise, everyone that kneels down to drink." And the number of those that lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men. But all the rest of the people knelt down to drink the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "With the 300 men that lapped, "I will deliver you and give the Midianites into your hand, "and let all the others go, every man to his home." And from verse 19: So Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch, and they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars, holding in their left hand, the torches, and in their right hands, the trumpets to blow. And they cried, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon." They stood every man in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. Our second reading comes from the book of Acts 20:17-28: And from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called to him, the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them, "You, yourselves, know how I lived among you all the time "from the first day I set foot in Asia, "serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, "and with trials which befell me "through the plots of the Jews. "How I did not shrink from declaring to you, "anything that was profitable, "and teaching you in public and from house to house, "testifying both to Jews and Greeks, "of repentance to God "and of faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ." "And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, "bound in the spirit; "not knowing what shall befall me there, "except that the holy spirit testifies to me in every city "that imprisonment and affliction await me. "But I do

not account my life of any value "nor as precious to myself, "if only I may accomplish my course "and the ministry which I receive from the Lord Jesus, "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. "And now, behold, I know that all you "among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom "will see my face no more. "Therefore, I testified to you this day, "I am innocent of the blood of all of you, "for I did not shrink from declaring to you, "the counsel of God. "Take heed to yourself and all the flock, "which the holy spirit has made you guardians, "to feed the church of the Lord, "which he obtained through his blood. "And now, I commend you to God "and to the word of his grace, "which is able to build you up "and to give you the inheritance among all those "who are sanctified." Let us stand now for the reading from the gospel of Matthew: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. "So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. "Be aware of those who will deliver you up to the councils "and flog you in their synagogues. "And you will be dragged before governors "and kings, for my sake, "to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. "When they deliver you up, "do not be anxious how you are to speak "or what you are to say, "for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. "For it is not you who speak, "but the spirit of your father speaking through you. "Brother will deliver up brother to death, "and the father, his child, "and children will rise against parents "and have them put to death, "and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. "But he who endures to the end will be saved. "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, "for truly, I say to you, "you will have not gone through all the towns of Israel "before the Son of Man comes. "A disciple is not above his teacher "nor a servant above his master. "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher "and the servant like his master. "If they have called the master of the house, Beelzebub, "how much worse will they malign those of his household? "So have no fear of them, "for nothing is covered that will not be revealed "or hidden, that will not be known. "What I tell you in the dark, "utter in the light, "and what you hear whispered, "proclaim from the housetops. "And do not fear those who kill the body, "but cannot kill the soul. "Rather fear the one who can destroy both body "and soul in hell. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? "And are not one of them to fall to the ground "without your father's will? "But even the hairs of your head are numbered. "Fear not, therefore, you are of more value "than many sparrows. "So everyone who acknowledges me before others, "I also will acknowledge them before my father, "who is in heaven. "But whoever denies me before others, "I also will deny before my father, who is in heaven." May the word of the Lord accomplish what it was sent to accomplish in your lives, amen. (gentle instrumental music) 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. Be seated. There is only one short announcement we need to make this morning, and regards the inserts in your bulletin. And the invitation is to those here or any who may be listening, that if you have homes or even apartments that would be available for rent for students in the fall, to contact central campus office. They would do the listing of that residence for free. The need is very desperate this fall, to find housing for students who have been accepted and don't have a place to live. The Lord be with you.

- And with your spirit.

- Let us pray. Oh, Lord, may your presence with us this morning, be as deeply felt as our relief from the heat,

the hardness of the pews, the broken edges of a heart, and the slow labor of a woman and her child as they seek to enter the world together. Clear a space in the jumble of our minds. Clear a space and set the lever of your word into place. Lift what needs lifting in our lives, into your light and grace. Overthrow the idols that block your Son of truth. If this is the season for building up, build us into your community of faith. If this is the season for tearing down, keep our hearts fixed on the promise of a new creation as our supporting walls crumble. In this confusing world of wolves and sheep, power and oppression, oh, Lord, remind us whose side we are on. Preserve the serpent and the dove in each of us. Don't let one consume or flee the other. We need the tension of your full creation in our lives. Send us into the world with the gifts of your wisdom and innocence. Let us go forth in search of Christ, who promises that the way will not be easy, but full of meaning. And in the words of the wisest and most innocent of all of your creation, let us 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 us our sins as we forgive those who sin 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.

- Let us pray. Dear Lord, will you find the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts acceptable in thy sight. We pray in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. I would like to take this opportunity, which comes to me this morning of addressing the entire university community assembled at worship, to say, thank you very much. From a newcomer to your community, my family and I moved here about one year ago, knowing very few people here, and we have been genuinely and warmly welcomed by you and others in Durham, and I say, thank you. I'm glad to be here, and glad to be here to share the word of God with you this morning. There were several, rather lengthy passages read this morning, coming to us from the electionary on this 8th, Sunday after Pentecost. I would like to reflect on all of those passages and also from a bit of Psalm 13, which also comes to us from the electionary. But I would like to concentrate particularly on the 16th verse of the 10th chapter of Matthew's gospel, where Jesus tells his disciples, "Look out, "I am sending you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. "Therefore be as shrewd as serpents "and as innocent as doves." This was an admonition for a time of waiting. A time during which the followers of Jesus would have to contend with a world not yet completely transformed by the good news. And for the Christian community, I would suggest that each passing year makes the living out of this admonition, more and more difficult. Living as serpents and doves gets harder and harder; the more we have to wait for the culmination of our faith, for the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The plea in the book of Revelation is our plea: "Come, Lord Jesus, come." And in waiting for him, some have utterly despaired, wondering whether it was God for whom they were waiting or as the dramatist has suggested, some fantasy (indistinct). And haven't all the faithful servants, sometimes found themselves speaking as the author of the 13th Psalm, who sings, "How long will you forget me, oh, Lord? "Forever? "How long will you hide your face from me? "How much longer must I endure grief in my soul "and sorrow in my heart by day and by night? "How much longer must my enemy have the upper hand of me?" Well, it is just this feeling on the part of the church, this agonizing uncertainty in waiting for God to prevail, that tempts the church to opt either for the psychologically easier way of being either serpent or dove, but not both together. Serpents and doves never have wanted to hold hands. Their perspective of the way things are and their corresponding ways of living are diametrically opposed. The serpent is a calculating skeptic who refuses to be too easily persuaded or taken in. He or she is a rock-hard realist who knows all about contests of struggle. A conniver who is cunningly able to manipulate

things to his or her advantage. There is a good bit of the serpent in Gideon, that biblical hero who stealthily tore down the alters of Baal by night in order to avoid getting caught. And who tested God with the fleece, not once, but twice, to be sure of his mission? But as we see from scripture, God would not allow this serpent Gideon to take matters entirely into his own hands. God foresaw the danger that lay ahead for a nation which trusted too much in its own devices. And so God demanded trust. God introduced Gideon into a situation in which he and his soldiers would have to rely not upon their own resources alone, but upon the steadfastness of God. And thus by God's grace, Gideon became not only serpent, but dove as well. Now, we are so used to associating the symbol of dove with peace. That this dove metaphor applied to the soldier, Gideon, seems oddly misplaced. But if we understand the dove, not primarily as an emblem for any particular political party or ethical persuasion, but rather as a symbol of trust. A self surrendering trust which risks itself by not depending in the end upon its own resources. If we look at the dove this way, then it becomes plausible to see Gideon as both serpent and dove. And in fact, a reluctance on our part to acknowledge the possibility of a synthesis between dove and serpent, very likely reflects our own discomfort in living out this very synthesis ourselves. After all, it's much easier either to live by one's own devices, totally immersed in the world and fighting its fire with fire or on the other hand, to strive to live in absolute purity, in a counter-cultural community which quite deliberately cuts itself off from the world in order to avoid corruption. But both of these extremes are in error. The error of the first is as we have seen that it relies too much upon its own calculations and not upon trust in God, as Gideon was tempted to do. In the last few years, we have witnessed the slackening of social involvement among some Christian congregations whose primary concern in years passed was witnessing to God through social action. And perhaps, the hymn which we will sing this morning offers an explanation for this phenomenon. My heart is weak and poor until it master find. It has no spring of action sure, but varies with the wind. It cannot drive the world until itself be driven. Its flag can only be unfurled when thou, oh, God, shall breathe from heaven. But we have witnessed also the error of the other extreme; the escape is to flight from the controversial affairs of the world, toward a purposely myopic, personal piety. And if the error of the first extreme can be described as the loss of one's footing in the shifting and swirling sands of time, then the second error is precisely hiding one's head under those sands to avoid seeing the storms altogether. But the kind of innocence urged by our text is not an innocence which plays ostrich, and nor is it an innocence which isn't aware of the evils of this world because it hasn't grown up yet. Jesus did, in fact, say, "Let the little ones come unto me, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And yet in connection with this text this morning, there is something misleading about seeing the child as a symbol for innocence. For here, innocence is not exemplified by the blind trust of a naive child, rather it is an innocence intentioned with shrewdness. And as such, it is fully aware, fully aware, of the evils of the world. It is not to be exemplified by the trust of Isaac, who followed his father's will, unaware of what was to befall him. Rather it is to be seen in the trust of Stephen, Stephen the martyr, who knew full well that the stones were poised to strike him down. And this innocence, which we are inspecting, is to be seen in the trust of Job; that veteran of faith who showed through his comments to his friends that he too was well aware of the ways of the world, and Job who had suffered much, but who still trusted in God's love and his power. And from an unlikely spot, I would like to take this passage from Robert Pirsig's, "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance." For it gives us yet another image of this innocence which is aware of evil, but remains calm and trusting. Pirsig writes, "In the fog of an early morning, in the marshes, there was a small duck, a teal, and I had winged it. And now, it couldn't fly. And I had run up upon it and I seized it by the neck. And before killing it, I had stopped. And

from some sense of the mystery of the universe, I had stared into its eyes and they gazed at me so calm. And so I'm comprehending and yet so aware. The innocence of this small bird is like the innocence of the dove, which is its intention with the serpent. It has suffered, it has stared evil right in the face, and yet it continues to trust. How we need just this kind of innocence in the church today? We need to be pure, yes, but not by remaining children and not by hiding our head in the sand. We must seek a purity which as an interpretation of the 16th chapter of Luke says, "Is as wise in its own ways, "as the sons of darkness are in theirs. "We need a purity which doesn't run "from the troubles of the world, "but rather seeks to infuse its own confidence, "its own direction and mature optimism into this world." Paul talks about this kind of purity in the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians, where he says, "Do all that has to be done "without complaining or arguing, "and then you will be innocent and genuine. "You will be perfect children of God "among a deceitful and underhand brood, "and you will shine in the world like bright stars "because you are offering it, the word of life." And following the scripture passage from Acts, which was read this morning, Paul echoes a warning, similar to the one which we found in Matthew, with the exception that this time, the wolves are inside the flock and not outside. Paul says, "Be on your guard for yourselves "and for all of the flock. "To feed the church of God, "which he brought with his own blood. "For I know quite well," continues Paul, "That when I have gone, fierce wolves will invade you "and will have no mercy on the flock. "And even from your own ranks, "there will be people coming forward "with a travesty of the truth upon their lips "to induce the disciples to follow them. "So be on your guard." So much for the warning, but what about the accompanying advice? It seems to me that Paul would clearly endorse the admonition from Matthew; "Be as shrewd as serpents "and as innocent as doves." Paul knew when to retreat and when to stand firm, when to parry on sensitive issues and when to thrust on essential ones. And Paul, was by no means, lacking in (indistinct). "Season your speech with salt," he once said, "So that you know how to answer everyone." Paul indeed was a diplomat par excellence. But his cunning never stooped to compromising the good news. He understood the ways of the world, but he did not give into them. He was fully aware of the doctrinal and the political, and the social forces that were splitting the church in his own day, and which would continue to split it as under. And he urged the church to be on guard against these forces, but he did not advise the church to isolate itself in order to protect itself against such threats. "Beyond guard," said Paul, "But stay among this deceitful generation "and don't run from the world. "You have the word of life "which this world so desperately needs to hear. "So stick with it. "Let your words ring out, "shine before men and women like bright stars," he says. As I survey the scene at Duke University, and as I talk with campus ministers on other campuses, and as I read of developments in the church, both nationally and internationally, I am very much encouraged to see that serpents and doves are beginning to hold hands. The extreme positions are still quite evident, of course, but there is a growing movement of Christians who are keeping themselves well informed about affairs in the world, and who want to understand the social structures and the forces of this world, and who want to get involved in transforming these structures and forces, but because of their deep love for Jesus Christ. And it is a matter of much rejoicing that a socially active Christian leadership is re-emerging; a leadership which has its roots in genuine piety and evangelical faith. It's a hard line to walk between serpent and dove; between giving into the world and giving up on it. Nevertheless, this is the disciples' walk, and it is our charge for a time of waiting. I will close with a portion of the 40th song, which reiterates so well, I think, what I have been trying to say about our mission, our anxieties, our impatience, our hopes, and our joys, in this time of waiting for the return of our Lord. The Psalmist sings, "I waited and waited for Yahweh. "Now, at last, he has stooped. "He has stooped to hear me. "He has heard my cry for

help. "He has put me out of the horrible pit "and out of the slough of the marshes, "and he has settled my feet on a rock. "He has studied my steps. "I have never kept your righteousness to myself, "but I have spoken of your faithfulness "and your saving help, Yahweh. "I have made no secret of your love and faithfulness "in the great assembly. "For your part, Yahweh, "do not withhold your kindness from me. "May your love and faithfulness constantly preserve me. "To me, poor or rich, come quickly Lord, "my helper, my savior, my God. "Come and do not delay, amen." Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, in a time of waiting, which is filled with temptations to go to one extreme or the other, help us to live in a time of ambiguity. Help us to learn the art of serpent and dove until you come again, and your victory is assured. Preserve us as workers, for your grace and your peace. In Jesus name, we pray, amen. (gentle instrumental music) (choir sings) (gentle instrumental music) (gentle instrumental music) (choir sings) (gentle instrumental music) (choir sings) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Oh, thou, most holy, loving God, accept the gifts of our hands, for we give thee, but thine own, amen. (gentle instrumental music) Now, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord lift the light of love's countenance upon you and give you peace both now and forever more, amen. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (gentle instrumental music) (group chattering)