

(tender music)

- Okay. (indistinct) Okay, this is the (indistinct) Any place where you have the page. Be sure to get it beyond (indistinct) on the entrance and for (indistinct) (woman vocalizing) Okay, so you can hear when the (indistinct) and take it from my (indistinct) (tender worship music) Now come on (indistinct) (choir laughing)

- We need to take turns. (tender music) (indistinct) (tender worship music) (bright worship music) (indistinct) (bright worship music) (tender worship music) (bright worship music)

- Oh God of peace, you have taught us that in returning to you, we shall find life. And that your support will be our strength. We pray for your enduring spirit to guide those who lead this worship, and all who worship today. That we may become aware of your sustaining presence. We pray in the spirit of our Lord, our amen. ♪ Praise to the Lord he's Almighty ♪ ♪ The king of creation ♪ ♪ Oh my soul praise the Lord ♪ ♪ He is my rock and salvation ♪ ♪ All ye who came ♪ ♪ Now to this temple crying ♪ ♪ Join me in acclamation ♪ (bright worship music) Let us now corporately confess our sin in the presence of our holy God and our friends here gathered. Eternal God, you who see into the secret places of pride and fear. You who see all the ways by which we seek to reconstruct ourselves. You who know we seek presentability rather than purity, amiability rather than love, and comfort, rather than justice, have mercy on us. For all the times we have chosen to remain hostile and ignorant, rather than compassionate and understanding. For all the times we have begged the world to gear its actions to our desires. And have whined when our plans were disturbed by human need. For all the times, when we have said, wait, until we are ready, to our brother and sister, and to you. For all of us who believe insulation from discomfort and suffering is our best solution to our peaceful life. For all of us who prefer you as a religious convenience, rather than a searing pardon, we pray for pardon. Creator, Lord, judge, come into our spirits as love and mercy. As you give us the courage to face up to ourselves and your work on our behalf this day. Amen. And now let us make our private confession. Rejoice in the good news that God does forgive our sins and that we are made whole. We give thanks for God's continuous love for us. Amen. (tender worship music) (bright worship music) The congregation will stand for the reading of the gospel taken from Matthew the fifth chapter. "You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil, but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, you will love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father, who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good. And sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father

is perfect." Thus endeth the reading for the day. (bright worship music) Let us affirm our faith. We are not alone, we live in God's world. We believe in God, who has created and is creating. Who has come in the true man, Jesus, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by his spirit. We trust him, he calls us to be in his church, to celebrate his presence, 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.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Oh, holy God, it is hard for us to comprehend that you who created this universe, you who always have been, you who know us, also care for us, and love us and respond to our prayers. Such awareness O Lord, causes us to bow before you, in awe, and with thanksgiving. Hear our prayers of thanksgiving, we give thanks for the future, and the new hope we feel as a people. We give thanks that we have responsibility for our lives, and for this world. And especially for the good people who act out your love and concern for us. And for those who have acted to bring us new hope as a nation. Hear our prayers of intercession oh Lord, we bring before you our divided lives, our divided families, our divided world, our divided church. May we be responsible to the unity evidenced in your love, and triumph over hateful divisions. We bring before you all people who are sorely troubled, those who are sick and dying, the lonely, the victims of injustice and disorder and oppression, all who suffer in any way. Remember oh Lord, those persons for whom we desire to pray, as we name them in the privacy of our heart. O sovereign of the universe, we bring you the concern of our country, and all countries in this world, you alone give wisdom and understanding. Inspire we pray, the minds and hearts of all who have responsibility of government and leadership, especially our president. Give to them the vision of truth and justice, and the strength to lead us to a just and righteous society. And oh God, we pray for those who suffer because of our economic crisis, and for all who are starving because of the droughts. We need your help to live responsibly, in these destructive times. We pray for your church, that it may be responsible for people being made whole in body and in spirit. Oh God, hear our prayers for ourselves. We know that our prayers are vain and empty, unless we are obedient to your will. And the needs we lift before you. You have given us the grace to be instruments of love in your works of healing and judgment. You have commissioned us to proclaim forgiveness and condemnation. Deliverance to the captive and captivity to the pried. Give us the patience of those who understand, and the impatience of those who love, that the might of your gentleness may work through us, and the mercy of your wrath may speak through us. And the healing of your spirit may rest in us. And hear us oh Lord, as we pray the prayer of your son. 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 and ever. Amen. This afternoon at five o'clock Mr. James Welch, assistant organist from Stanford University, will play the final concert in the summer series. You are invited this afternoon here to do chapel for this concert. We appreciate the fine contribution Meredith Parker and the summer choir, have made to our worship. We will miss you next Sunday, we welcome you back for the new year. We welcome to the pulpit today, Mr. Jim Green, who has been closely associated with, and a good friend of the Duke Campus Ministry, since he began his work here with us, several years ago. We are glad to hear you, Jim.

- Several years ago, more than I care to remember, when I was in junior high school, a close friend, and I had a long and hot argument. Finally in frustration, he reached over and slapped me across the cheek, saying as he did so, "The Bible says, turn the other cheek." Well, you know, I believed in the Bible, or at least I thought I ought to, so I rather hesitatingly turned the other jaw, and sure enough, he slapped me on that cheek. But I balled up my fist and knocked him almost across the room saying as I did so, "The Bible doesn't say what to do next." (congregation laughs) And yet, you know, somehow I think I missed in that encounter the spirit of the New Testament. When the whole issue of impeachment was boiling a few days ago, some of our people ostensibly on Christian and basis, were shouting rather simplistically, that only those who were without sin should cast stones. What chance is there for any confrontation and the subsequent reconciliation in a bad scene, when individuals are not able to effect the marriage of personal piety and social responsibility. When we are unable and unwilling to see and admit a wrong, there's no chance for reconciliation. Similarly, men who called for impeachment primarily because had been duped, were in that instance, behaving less than responsibly. Vengeance born out of frustration, can have no reconciling dimension. My question then, and the one to which I offer your attention this morning for rumination, has to do with the roots out of which reconciliation may develop, and the growth which may sustain the fruits of reconciliation. Back to my teenage experience for a moment. What does a person in effect say? What does he communicate about you, when he slaps your face? Now he may do it physically, he may do it verbally, he may somehow do it emotionally or by use of structure. What in fact, does this convey? I submit that the slap on the face communicates, I'm bigger than you are. You're not important to me. I'm stronger than you. You're no good. I don't think much of you. Now, our immediate and very natural reaction, is to ball up our fist, whether we do it emotionally or verbally or physically, and prove to our distractor, that we are too, as big as he. That we can in fact, take care of ourselves. Now, if I read Matthew correctly, Jesus is saying here, that a child of God does not have to take his cue about himself, from what other people think of him. We do not have to prove anything to anybody. Based on our acceptance of God's affirmation of us, we are free to turn the other cheek. Here is security sufficient to function in spite of our outside ambiguity, turmoil, and conflict. Now I'm not able to say unequivocally, that there are no roots of security with comparable depth and breadth. I'm a Christian. These are the roots that I know. Let me make however, two comments in this regard. I believe that community is essential to maturity. Community can deepen and intensify the root system to continue my analogy. But I am not willing to say that a security system, which includes only community has comparable staying power. In fact, I doubt it. In years past, I have taught courses and I have dialogued regularly with devotees of various religions. My tentative judgment still stands. Christian anthropology, the view of man's need and weakness and strength, implicit and traditional Christian theology may approach the truth about us. We humans may in fact, need a point of reference outside our sphere. It's an unusual person whose inner security is not ripped apart when his relational world crumbles. Unless there is some peg driven down in the dimension of faith. It seems to me that making usual people able to function in an unusual way is a pretty important concern. Most of us are in fact, fairly usual people. What I'm saying is that I see no other strong peg on which to base my acceptance of myself, than God's affirmation of me. He called me good in Eden, and he pronounced me free at Calvary. That's enough. I am okay. In spite of the stuff in me that I know needs cleaning up. Now, these are the roots I speak of. What about the limbs and the fruits? The question now becomes, in what ways does this personalized and to some real degree individualized foundation, in what way do these roots give opportunity for an encouragement to the flowering of reconciliation? In order

for my suggestions to be more personal, I want to phrase them in the first person singular. These are insights, which as the old guy says, I'm beginning to start to commence to think about the possibility of setting out on. These are insights which are beginning to be actualized in my style of life. First, this kind of acceptance of God's acceptance of me, allows me to fail and to admit my failure. Ours is a competitive society. We measure ourselves by each other. Over the years, we teach ourselves that we've got to win we're in the business of proving ourselves to one another. Have you ever seen some from other cultures, perhaps playing table tennis? I remember when I lived overseas, I watched individuals play for hours in titling, and never keeps going. Little League, which may have started as an attempt to let children play as another example, has become in many cases, a win at all cost pressure cooker. I think this is a microcosm of our culture. We are afraid to fail. Not in terms of total life alone. We are afraid to fail in any particular. We have become used to valuing ourselves in terms of our successes. In regard to Little League by the way, I'm delighted that the church itself in some cases has to provided an alternative. I was in Indianapolis on a research project not long ago, and visited with a med school faculty member, a ball practice in the league where he was coaching. It seems that a new league has been started there and perhaps it's in existence in other places. The purpose of this group is to play. Every child on the team, for example, gets to bat before anybody else bats a second time. Whether the child is in the field or riding the bench. Further, if any team scores as many as seven runs, in a particular inning, that inning's over, that team's out, and it goes to the field. Some persons are attempting to structure a game so that it is in fact a game. But I submit to you that this is against our national pension for competitiveness. We have to push to beat someone else. My concern at this juncture though, is not with a critique of our culture. The counterculture I think has had some balancing influence. And for that, I'm thankful. My point here is that in many cases in our society, our ability to feel good about ourselves hinges on our not fouling up in any way. Or in our being able to perceive ourselves as a bit better than a neighbor. I don't know about you, but when I was a teenager and even beyond that, I tended to balance out myself in my mind by making sure that I was a little better than my peers. If someone, for example, was demonstrated to be more popular than I, I would say in my mind, but I'm more sensitive. And I could live with that. I had better sense than to say it out loud. If someone made better grades than I, I could say in my mind to let me live with myself and my friend, he may make better grades, I can't argue that point, but I'm more popular. And on and on it went. I submit to you that this comparison of ourselves with ourselves and is an infection endemic in our society. With this pressure, with this tendency to judge ourselves by ourselves, it's most difficult to admit a failure, to give up a point or to be made to be foolish. Assurance of my worth in God's sight. That is a gut acknowledgement that I don't have to earn God's favor or approval, makes it possible for me not to take myself so seriously. It's even possible to admit a failure. Paul phrased it actually knocked down, but not knocked out. That's a relaxing way to live. I'm beginning to be convinced that only a relatively relaxed person has any chance of forgiving, accepting forgiveness, and risking himself in true reconciliation. A community where people are free to admit mistakes, to be seen as less than in control can underline and help a person actualize in his feelings in that particular emotional dimension, what he knows in his mind. I found that a group of people who care enough about me to express in fairly direct terms occasionally their love for me, and in addition, care enough about me to disagree with me or correct me on occasion, gives me an unusual sense of freedom. It's great to know that friends will differ and dialogue with you about decisions, actions, and words. It's freeing because in that setting, there's an extra reason not to have to feel that you're entirely and ultimately responsible for the whole ball of wax. This with the perspective of God's act in Christ, is teaching me in an existential way, the

meaning of grace. My acceptance, warts, and all. Now, when it's possible for me to admit my failure, I'm open to looking at an unhappy or difficult relationship in a way which will allow me to admit error. Have you ever known a person whose whole lifestyle assumption is that he cannot be wrong? There's no chance in this arena for a reconciling experience. In as much as I'm experiencing the acceptance of grace, I'm able to admit my part in the myriad upheavals which plague human relationships. Protestants in these days have a difficult time understanding or accepting corporate guilt. And I think here it's even possible when we're able to see that we are not accepted totally on the basis of our cleanliness. It's even possible for us to entertain the idea of corporate guilt on the part of our society. For you see, my standing isn't tied up with a good evaluation of the group of which I'm a part. Second, if my judgment about my self can be softened to include failure and wrong, it becomes possible at that point for me to admit that someone who is worth something to God and to me has done me wrong. One of the things that bothers me about our southern belief, is that it's difficult for us to admit that someone has done us wrong. We live in an abandoned farmhouse that my family and I put back together some years ago. One day in the process of doing that, my children and I were painting in my son's room. Now they had small brushes and I was attempting to edge some fairly delicate work with a four inch paint brush. Well, I slipped and splattered paint on the wall. And my son whose room it was, made some comment about it. And I was quick to let him know that if they wanted to enjoy helping me, and they were using the brushes that were really appropriate, that they were gonna have to plan to have some problems. And we left it at that. Well at supper, I had a chance to rethink it. And so I said to James, "I goofed. I really was thinking about something else, and I really was working too fast. And even though that brush was too big for the job, the fact of the matter is I goofed." The next day, he and I were working together on another project. And a seven year old boy who was holding a piece of wood for me, let that piece slip. And it scared me, and it hurt me very slightly. And he was able to say, as he looked up to me, "Dad, I'm sorry, I goofed." Every time before then, it had been, "It slipped." You've heard those of you who are parents, you know, "It dropped." "It slipped." "It had been bad." Or, "Look what you made me do." But this time he was able to say, "I goofed, I'm sorry." Why? I think because he knew, well, I think he knew that I could accept a mistake in him, because he had seen me admit a mistake of my own and move on. When our standards are perfectionistic, when we judge ourselves and others only on the basis of accomplishment and good, our tendency is to protect and defend ourselves either by implicitly denying the worth of the person who has wronged us, denying that we have been wronged, which is our culture's way of doing it, or denying, you know, that any person other than ourselves had anything to do with it. In either case, there's no basis for reconciliation. When I was a child, my mother's advice on occasion when somebody had hurt me was, you know, ignore the source and forget it. Have you ever heard that? Now that may be a pretty good immediate bandaid, but it is bad theology, and it's certainly no good for long range lubrication of relationships. No one will ever work at restoring a relationship with one who isn't worth acknowledging. My point here is, that a relaxed affirmation of my worth, lets me affirm your value, and admit that I need you. Even enough to let you hurt me. This can be I submit, the beginning of an ability to call a hurt a hurt. Call a hurt, a hurt. And then move on to forgive. Because the hurter is important. Let me quickly suggest in the third place, that the kind of gentle on my mind self affirmation I'm talking about, allows me to acknowledge my feelings, and at the same time not be ruled by them. It's not essential that I feel good all the time. My acceptance of myself is not always based on my feeling good about myself. I can be frustrated or hurt as a result of an insult, and yet I don't have to run or sulk. I can be angry, which for me is very, very close to being fearful, as a result of some injury. And still not have to prove myself. Feelings are

real. And they do influence me. When I can tip my hat to them though, to use Bill Peck's terminology, they are not able to bully me. Acknowledging my feelings is essential, because they are not the basis of self acceptance however, I do not have to let them rule me. This allows me to be hurt and to admit it, and still not have to prove it's okay. Finally, when I don't have to fit people into my preoccupation with myself, I can give them back to themselves and can avoid getting boxed into using them for my purposes. You see, not only is the secure individual able to affirm other persons who are friends or who have earned his respect, he's able to affirm those who differ from him, do not serve his ends or stand in his way. Jesus, in the same chapter of Matthew, has strong words about looking on a woman to lust after her. Now there probably were and are sexual implications to this, but I think a specific application has to do with the danger of seeing a person as a thing, to satisfy or elevate oneself. When I was being considered for my present position, one person raised questions about my coming to that job. The bosses liked me, my colleagues liked me, students could accept me, pastors could accept me. One person had questions. The woman who had worked with me for a number of months as a secretary, was not at all sure about me. Her complaint was this, "I'm afraid he sees me as an instrument to get his job done." Now that's a damning indictment. And she was right. I had been so caught up with the job. I had been so task oriented. My self identity had been so tied in, that I used her much as I would a typewriter or a machine. All that, while I was piously talking about serving God. Had our relationship gotten fouled up, had she hurt or wronged me, there was no way in which with that kind of mindset, I could reach out in reconciliation. Obviously there's no way that any person will reach out in the hurt and perspiration, that is in the beginning of reconciliation to an instrument or to a vehicle of accomplishment. When we have to produce, the detours of problem relationships are intolerable. And we set out to surround ourselves by those who will present no problems. In a job, this may be valid. As an approach to life, it's impossible and devastating. Jesus tells me to love my enemy. No way. No way, unless the pool of good will in which I have my existence, is welling up with sufficient consistency and power to let me not only splash, but pipe toward him, that good will, certain that there's enough there. Not only for me, but for him. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. I pray that you know this and become in the going an instrument of his peace. Amen. (bright worship music) (tender worship music) (tender worship music continues) ♪ Glory, glory ♪ (bright choir worship music) ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ (tender worship music) (bright worship music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (bright worship music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (tender worship music)

- Oh holy God, Give us your spirit we pray, to cleanse our hearts, direct the use of our gifts and perfect the offering of ourselves to you. We pray in the spirit of Jesus the Christ, amen. (bright worship music) Send us forth oh Lord, with your blessing and accompany us ever with your grace, that we may hence forth live in peace, love and holiness, and may your all encompassing love, support us now and forever. Amen. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (church bell ringing) (bright worship music)