

(upbeat organ music)

- If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, God is good, and faithful, and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God. Our Heavenly Father, who by thy love has made us, and through thy love has kept us, and in thy love would make us perfect, we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. And that we have not loved one another as Christ hath loved us. Thy life is within our souls, but our selfishness has hindered thee. We have not lived by faith, we have resisted thy spirit, we have neglected thy inspirations. Forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and in thy spirit direct what we shall be. That thou mayest come into the full glory of thy creation in us, and in all men, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And let us hear the words of assurance from the scriptures. This is the message we have heard from him, and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all those who turn to him with true repentance and sincere faith, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins. Confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and bring us to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

- I shall read from Exodus 3:1-6. Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the Mountain of God, and the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked, and lo the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see God called to him out of the bush. "Moses, Moses," and he said, "Here am I," then he said, "Do not come near, put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at the face of God. (upbeat organ music) Our New Testament lesson for this morning comes from Luke 12:13-21. "One of the multitudes said to him, 'teacher did my brother divide the inheritance with me?'" "But he said to him, 'Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?'" "And he said to them, 'take heed and be aware of all covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'" "And he told them a parable saying 'The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought to himself, what shall I do? for I have nowhere to store my crops.'" "And he said, I will do this, 'I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'" "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years, take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.'" "But God said to him, 'Fool, this night your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" "So is he who lays up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God." Thus endeth our new Testament reading. (upbeat organ music)

- The Lord be with you, let us pray. Let us say, together, our union prayer of thanksgiving. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we bless and magnify thy holy name, for the gift of thy most dearly beloved son, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. And for all his apostles, prophets, martyrs, evangelists, teachers, and pastors, whom he hath sent abroad into the world for thy holy church universal, for the ministry of the laity, and the ministry of the ordained. We do give thee hearty thanks for the privilege which each one of us has a bearing witness to the saving grace of our Lord. We express our gratitude. We thank thee for life, for a measure of health, for friends, for food, for clothing, and for all the purposes of Christ, which give meaning to these earthly goods. We make our prayer of thanks in Jesus name, amen. Be seated. Now our prayers for others, and for ourselves, Father in Heaven look down in mercy upon our distraught and fevered world. Forgive the mistaken ambitions, the selfish passions, and the presumptuous claims of men. Remove all suspicion and bitterness from among the nations of the world, and bring them to peace and concord by the redeeming love of Christ. We pray for our beloved land, for our president, our leaders and governors, and for all who have part in public service. Make them pure in motive, wise in counsel, and strong in action, doing right in fear of thy holy name. Remember, oh Lord, thy church upon Earth. Deepen her influence, and extend her power for good until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And oh Mighty God, we beseech thee with thy gracious favor to behold our universities, colleges, and schools, and especially Duke University, that knowledge may increase among us and all good learning flourish and abound. Bless all who teach, and all who learn, and grant that in humility of heart they may ever look unto thee, who art the fountain of all wisdom. Have mercy oh Lord upon those who are passing through sore trial, the poor, the sick, the anxious, the oppressed. Those who are in danger from the fury of the elements or from the violence of men. Inspire in us, and in our fellow man the will to help our suffering brethren. Heal, protect, and strengthen them according to their need. Comfort those in sorrow with the comfort, which is in Christ, Jesus, our Lord. We commend to thy almighty protection thy servants, the members of the Duke football team, for whose preservation our prayers are desired. Guard them, we beseech thee, from the dangers of the game, from sickness, and from every evil to which they may be exposed. Conduct them in safety through the season, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Oh Gracious Father, who through thy mercy has added another day to our lives, we here dedicate both our souls and bodies to thee and thy service. In a sober, righteous, and godly light, in which resolution do thou, oh Merciful God confirm and strengthen us, that as we grow in age, we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, But oh God, who knoweth the weakness and corruption of our nature, and the manifold temptations which we daily meet with. We humbly beseech thee to have compassion on our infirmities, and to give us the constant assistance of thy Holy Spirit, that we may be effectually restrained from sin, and incited to our duty. Imprint upon our hearts such a dread of thy judgment, and such a grateful sense of thy goodness to us, as we may make both afraid and ashamed to offend thee. And above all, keep in our minds a lively remembrance of that great day in which we must give a strict account of our thoughts, words, and actions to whom thou hast appointed the judge of quick and dead thy son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. In particular, we implore thy grace and protection for the ensuing day, keep us temperate in all things, and diligent in our several callings. Grant us patience under our afflictions, give us grace to be just and upright in all our dealings, quiet and peaceable, full of compassion, and ready to do good to all men according to our abilities and opportunities. Direct us in all our ways, defend us from all dangers and adversities and be graciously pleased to take us, and all who are dear to us under thy fatherly care and protection. These things and whatever else thou shall see to be necessary and convenient to us we humbly beseech of you, through the merits and mediation of

thy son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. And now we are bold to say, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever, amen. And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all ever more, amen. (upbeat organ music)

- Let the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord our strength, and our Redeemer. Amen. Needless to say, it is a privilege for me to be here today, to return to my school. To return to the place where I suffered, to return to the place where I struggled, to return to the place where I celebrated and knew joy, to return to the place where I worshiped. For some of us, it has been a long night. The word I get is that the team got home at 2:00 AM., and this reminds me of a situation that I was in just about a year ago. I was assigned the task of preaching in the Cadet Chapel at West Point, where I work, on Sunday morning following the Army-Notre Dame football game, which was played the previous afternoon in Yankee Stadium. The team and the whole core of cadets attended. They returned to West Point at 3:00 AM, and the first service was held at 8:00 AM. And I remember thinking that if I really wanted to be relevant, I mean, if I really wanted to preach and to be where they were, I should probably begin my sermon and then somewhere along in the middle of it, fall asleep. I approached that service, I remember, with fear and trembling because I suddenly remembered the story of the guy who dreamed that he was preaching to a thousand people, and when he woke up, he found out that he was. I assure you I will not fall asleep this morning, and I hope that none of you will either, particularly the players. I don't know how many of you have ever been to Yankee Stadium, or how many of you have ever been to New York City, but certainly one of the first impressions that a visitor gets to that city is the fantastic number of people that somehow live there. You ask, where do they come from and where do they go? How do they find room in the night? Of course, the answer is that most of them live in apartments, which are stacked on top of one another and reach high into the sky. The number of people there is part of the problem. Dostoevsky once described the way that men organized themselves. He used three symbols, he used the anthill, the chicken coop, and the Crystal Palace. There actually was a building called the Crystal Palace. It was constructed of glass and steel, and had been put together for the exposition in London. It represented the very latest in man's achievement. It was the symbol of perfection and attainment, and Dostoevsky was writing against the creeping socialism of his time, which said the Crystal Palace is a symbol of all that man needs. Dostoevsky was saying it is really nothing but an oversized anthill, a more imposing chicken coop. He was saying that you can take care of some of your needs, and that is necessary, but if that's it, then forget it. Because life has got to have more than that. Forget it! That's what Dustin Hoffman was saying to a great extent in the movie, "The Graduate." As you know, those of you that have seen that movie, his parents threw the big homecoming party for their pride and joy who had graduated from college. Everyone kept coming up to him and saying how proud they were of all of his accomplishments off at college. Finally, one man came over and said to him, "Plastics. "Plastics, you have to go into plastics. "The future is in plastics." And a great portion of the remainder of that film has do with Dustin Hoffman telling all of them to forget it. To forget it. A year ago, Peggy Lee had a hit record. And in that song she remembers a fire in which her home burned to the ground, she was a child. She remembers going to a circus with all of its gaudiness and shining tinsel. She remembers a broken love affair. Finally reflects on death itself, and after each memory, she comes back to

the chorus. If that's all there is, if that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing, let's break out the booze and have a ball. If that's all there is. If that's all there is, forget it. Jesus told a parable which was read as the New Testament reading for the morning. He told a parable about the man who grew all the crops, and then built the huge store houses to keep them in. He thought that he would be a lucky man. He could take life easy and drink, and enjoy himself. And in the parable, what is he called? He's called a fool. A fool. He is a fool because yes, he would be able to quit work and to eat and to drink until he was almost perhaps too obese to move himself from beside the swimming pool. But as to whether he would really enjoy life, and have a hold on this thing that people yearn for the fulfillment of life, that is a different question. In fact, the point of the parable was that he was a fool to think that these things would give him fulfillment and joyful living. If that's all there is then forget it. There must be more to life than Crystal Palaces and circus parades, and a future in plastics, and barns filled with grain, and a capacity crowd in Yankee Stadium, and Honda 350s, and a midnight high. If that's all there is, then forget it. For these things will not give what they promise, for in so many situations they promise fulfillment, and joyful living. They promise to fill the void that you yearn to have filled. They are like ant hills. So the question that many of us ask, certainly any student, what is it that really gives us life? What does it mean to be alive, to really live, what does it mean? Not to prepare to live, but to live, when do you begin living? Is it after final exams? Is it after next Saturday? Is it after graduation? Is it after the first job? Is it after you're married? Is it after children? Is it after you have enough time to live life more leisurely? Is it after you retire? When do we stop preparing to live and start living? What causes us to say that life is so fine? What causes us to celebrate life? Most of us know that the possession of material things is not the answer. And we are painfully learning that organization and systems are not the answer. But that they must constantly have to be restructured and reborn. Most of us know that it's not computers, as indispensable as we have made them. What is it? Well, if we open our eyes and our ears and let them see, and let them hear, and look at the contemporary world in which we live, We see everyone yearning and struggling, and reaching out for an answer. They're reaching out for the answer. What is it? It's freedom. Freedom. We are in the midst of a freedom revolution. From Asia, to Africa, to Czechoslovakia, to Berlin, to the United States of America, there is an emerging consensus that life, in order to be worthwhile, has got to have freedom. A man must be free. The consensus is that the living will only bring deep joy if we are personally liberated. If you're able to assert yourself, and who you are, not as others expect you to be. They try to manipulate you into being. That's what it means to live, that's what it means to be human. We are born to be free. Born to be free. And in the parable the problem with the rich farmer is that he was not free, he was a slave. He was a captive to an illusion, a false hope, he was a captive to a myth. Speaking in today's terms, he believed the commercial swindlers of his time who told him that real liberation would come to him through their product, through their warehouses, through their airline flight, behind their neon sign, within their ant hill, or Crystal Palace. He was a fool to believe it, because he was tied, and gagged, and bound personally. He was not free. He was trying to meet a problem of the human spirit through ways and means that would not fulfill. How often we fall into that trap, our pleasure is in buying, our hope is in owning, our hopes are in making a name for ourselves. Always preparing to live, never living. Always bound and constantly struggling for release, but never quite free. Freedom is always just one more purchase, it's one more accomplishment, it's one more game, it's one more year away. We are like the rich farmer. We need to be set free. What does that mean? The term personal liberation is used so much it has become a cliché. What does that mean? Some of us still think that real freedom means lack of constraint, and lack of all inhibitions. Some of us still think that true freedom means acting out everything

that you feel. Some of us still believe that we can get free from any and everything. Freedom is to get as high as you can, and then drop until you dance, dance until you drop. I'm getting high. Dance until you drop. But one is never totally liberated from any and everything, for every time you talk about being liberated from something, we're talking about being liberated to something. There is the great story, you know, that is told about the football team that was out in the Big 10. They had never been there before, in fact the Big 10 had scheduled them as a warm-up game. And the players were pretty well overawed. I mean this was a massive stadium, these were strange surroundings. The locker room was in the field house, which was connected to the stadium by a tunnel. They got into the game, and into the first half the score was 17 to nothing. This team had been so overawed that they just could not function. Mistakes, mistakes, mistakes. And so the coach came in at halftime and he really let them have it. And he said, we've got a great game plan, we've got good material, but the problem is you're all uptight. You're overawed. I know this is a strange place, I know we've never been here before, but you've gotta loosen up. You gotta start thinking, moving. So he began to conclude, it's time to go back out. He said, "I know this is a strange place. "We've never been here, we've never been on that field, "we've never been in this locker room. "But when I count to three I'm gonna say go. "When I say go I want to hear 44 pairs of cleats "hit this floor, and I want to hear them clack clack, "and I wanna see you go through that door." He pointed to the door. They were charged up. "1, 2, 3, go." 44 pairs of cleats hit the floor, clack, clack, clack across the floor, they broke down the door. It was the wrong door. Six fell into the swimming pool. (congregation laughing) They were liberated from the locker room, but they were liberated to the wrong sport. They were liberated to the pool. The coach probably was fired, or thrown in himself. The wise man considers the consequences of his liberation. We are always liberated from something, but then it's being liberated to something. What do we need to be liberated from? The parable of the Prodigal Son, I think, is a great story to answer that question. The familiar story of the younger son who desperately wanted freedom. Freedom from his home, freedom from his parents, freedom from his brother, that older brother. Freedom from his work. Freedom from the drudgery of day to day existence. So he packed up all of his possessions, took all in his inheritance, and moved out, changed his environment. Whereupon he spent all of his money, and lost all of his possessions. But you know, he returned home and his father ran down the road to meet him, embraced him and called for a great celebration. Those great words his father said "He was dead and is alive again. "He was lost, and now he's found." You see the younger son thought that what he needed was freedom from home, and perhaps that was a valid need. To get away, to change the environment. What he also needed was freedom from himself. He was miserable at home, he changed his environment, he had the money to spend, and he blew it. He blew the whole deal. Cause he was not freed from himself as well. To be truly free, you must be free from yourself. Freedom from yourself. That is what the Christian gospel is about. It's about setting people free. That's why it is often referred to, I think, as the Good News. The Good News is that God's grace, that God's love is available, and that once a man has accepted that love, he is set free. Set free from his faults, and deceiving allegiance to himself, he may still bear the marks and the consequences of his sin, but the burden of guilt, the shackles of defensiveness, and the driving need to prove himself, or to prove herself to the world, is gone. Not removed by self will, and not removed by achievement, but because of a new order, a new spirit, a new life given as a gift. Paul, new freedom. Once he wrote "Christ has made us "completely free "stand fast then and do not again "be hampered with the yoke of slavery. "Through the spirit of Christ we are freed from ourselves." Listen, once again, to the words that were spoken by Martin Luther King, immediately, before he was killed, "I am free. "I am free. "Thank God Almighty, "I am free at last." Through Christ we are freed from ourselves.

But what are we freed to? What does it cost? Where does it send us? What are we freed to? We are freed to discipleship. That's a word that has lost a lot of meaning. What does it mean? It means freed to follow, freed to give, freed to work, freed to love, freed to suffer, and to be used as a vessel of healing and reconciliation, no matter where you are, within what kind of structure you exist. Freed to others. Freed to your neighbor, that's what you're freed to. The rich farmer was a fool because he believed a false hope. He also as a fool because he was an isolationist. Christian discipleship means being freed from individualism to humanitarianism. There's that great cartoon in Peanuts, Charlie Brown is deciding that he's going to be a doctor, and Lucy of course would not allow any thoughts like that. So she says to him, "You could never be a doctor." Charlie Brown says, "Oh yes, I wanna be a doctor." She said, "You know why you could never be a doctor? "You don't love mankind." Charlie Brown says, "Oh yes I do, I love mankind." She said, "No you don't." "Yes I do," and he begins to get very angry. And finally he says, "I love mankind! "It's just people that I can't stand." You are freed to people. Freed to bear with another the joys and the burdens of life. Free to risk ourselves, to identify with the triumphs and the tragedies of those around us. Freed to care, as an act of love, and that can cost. It can bring all kinds of repercussions, and increasingly it does, as we become more polarized in our own society. It can cost you, but as one man said, you will never be a whole person until you have risked standing alongside a neighbor in his need. The heart of the Christian discipleship is to care, through caring to come to know the reality of God. Someone said, "God has two faces." "God has two faces, your face and my face." God is revealed to us. We share each other's lives. So in conclusion, Crystal Palaces, future in plastics, barns filled with grain, a capacity crowd in Yankee Stadium, life has got to have more than that. The parable of the rich farmer is old, and as simple as it may be, is still relevant. It causes us to examine our living, our values, our goals. It causes us to ask seriously what it means to truly live. What is it that gives us life? Its freedom. Freedom is a problem of the human spirit. This is what Jesus the Christ came to effect to set us free. Free from ourselves. Free to each other. The gift is there, the question is who will accept it? Who is willing to be set free? Free from himself, free to his neighbor. Let us pray. Eternal God, our Father, unto thee we lift our prayers of adoration. All glory and honor be to thee. We give thee thanks for thy son who came to us as one of us in order that we might know thy love for us, in the name of Christ, who gave his life to prove that love. Grant us meaningful lives. Grant us celebration of life. Grant us freedom. We pray this in the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen. (upbeat organ music)