

(church organ music)

- Good morning, and welcome to this service of worship at Duke University Chapel. We particularly welcome this morning the 1989 Duke Football team and their coaches. It's a tradition here for them to worship with us on the first Sunday when they're back, and we wish these fine scholar athletes the best of luck this year. Today's offering in its entirety will go to a new project here at Duke that the chapel is very interested in, and I have invited Adam Spilker, a Duke junior, to say a brief word about today's offering.

- This Friday, 30 Duke University freshmen, as well as 12 upper class staff, will be involved in a project at Duke called Project Build. During Project Build, we will be introducing all these participants to various aspects of Durham life through community service projects, tours, and speakers. The main group we will be working with is Habitat for Humanity, an organization that builds houses with those in need in complete partnership. In addition, we'll be working with the community kitchen, the Community Life Program, the Edgemont View Gardens Community Center, the First Presbyterian day school, the Sunshares, which is an environmental group, and the Threshold. Through all these projects, Project Build aims to increase the relationship between Duke and Durham. A relationship, by the way, which has been strengthened over the last number of years, particularly through increased Duke volunteerism. Importantly, the freshmen also will be involved in community service before they even take one class at Duke so that they will be able to spend their entire 4 years here at Duke involved in Durham and feel a part of the Durham community. And through your support, project build and community service can remain a permanent part of the Duke University students' Duke experience, thank you.

- Thank you, Adam. And we invite you to give generously. This is the last Sunday for our summer choir under the direction of Ms. Donna Sparks, and we thank the summer choir for their faithfulness throughout the summer. We also welcome our guest musicians today, Matt McCloud and Leslie Trussler. Our guest preacher today, a James Cleland preacher, he's a Reverend Doctor Peter Gones who is a minister at Memorial Church Harvard University and one of our favorite guest preachers here at the chapel. Doctor Gones will be returning to us in December as the first Pelham Wilder junior guest preacher, and so we'll get to hear him again, and we welcome this great Christian communicator and leader in campus ministry back to our pulpit. Let us continue now our worship. (choir sings) (church organ music) (choir and congregation sings)

- Gracious God, in coming to this place to worship, we join all those who at all times and places have lifted their voices in praise to you. Bless this our gathering, we pray with your spirit that your word may be preached with boldness, that our ears and hearts may be open to receive your word, and that we might be strengthened to go forth from this place to do your word. In thy name we pray, amen. Be seated.

- Let us pray. Open our ears and minds, oh God by the power of your holy spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed we might hear with joy what you say to us this day, amen. The first lesson is taken from the

18th chapter of the book of Jeremiah beginning at the first verse. The word that came to Jeremiah from God, "Arise and go down to the potter's house, "and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the house of the potter who was working at the wheel, and the vessel being made of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand. So the potter reworked it into another vessel as it seemed good to do. Then the word of God came to me, "Oh house of Israel, "can I not do with you as this potter has done," says the Lord. Behold like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hands, Oh house of Israel. If at anytime I declare concerning a nation or kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation concerning which I have spoken turns from its evil I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or kingdom that I will build and plant it and if it does evil in my sight not listening to my voice then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it. Now therefore say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am shaping evil against you "and devising a plan against you. "Return everyone from your evil way "and amend your ways and your doings." Here ends the reading of the first lesson.

- Stand for the Psalm. The foolish say in their heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good. God looks down from heaven upon humankind to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God. (congregation chants) There they shall be in great terror for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would confound the plans of the poor, but God is their refuge.

Congregation: For the deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion when God restores the fortunes of God's people, Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad. (church organ) (choir and congregation sings)

- The second lesson is taken from the 11th chapter of Paul's letter to the Hebrews. Verses one through three and eight through 19. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for. The conviction of things not seen. Provide our ancestors received divine approval. By faith, we understand that the world was created by the word of God. So that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where to he was to go. By faith, he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive. Even when she was past the age since she considered faithful the one who has promised. Therefore, from one as good as dead were born descendants. As many as the stars of heaven and as enumerable as the grains of sand by the seashore. These all died in faith not having received what was promised but having seen it and greeted it from afar. And having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out they would have had opportunity to return, but as it is they desire a better country. That is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, having prepared for them a city. By faith, Abraham, when he was tested offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendens be named." Abraham considered that God was able even to raise the dead. Hence figuratively speaking, Abraham did receive Isaac back. Here ends the reading of the second lesson. (church organ) (choir sings)

- The Holy Gospel is written in the 12th chapter of St. Luke beginning at the 32nd verse. Fear not, little flock, for it is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old with the treasure in heavens that does not fail where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where you treasure is there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like those who are waiting for their Lord to come home from the marriage feast so that they may open the door at once when the Lord comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants who are then found awake. Truly I say to you the Lord will be girded, and have them sit at table and will come and serve them. If the Lord comes in the second watch or in the third and finds them so blessed are those servants. And you know this, that if a householder had known at what hour a thief was coming that householder would not have left the house to be broken into. You also must be ready for the son of man is coming at an unexpected hour. Hear ends the reading of the gospel.

- Let us pray. Help us, Lord, to become masters of ourselves that we may become the servants of others. Take our hands and work through them. take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire for Christ's sake, amen. I always like to come to Duke Chapel because on my visits to this great place and this great university I am always instructed, and I always find bits of wisdom to take home and to try to apply in the Duke of the north. One of the lessons that I have learned this morning already is to try to invite the Harvard football team to come to chapel. (congregation laughing) Gentlemen, maybe we would do better than we do if our team came to chapel as you do. Now I know you only do this once a year, and probably under some degree of duress. But for a one-time visitor to hit the Sunday when you are here is very impressive indeed. And if you win any games at all this year, I trust you will know it is because you were in chapel on the Sunday I preached to you. (congregation laughing) This sermon had its beginnings last spring around the season of commencement when I along with Dean Willimon and house preachers all over the country compelled to confront that community of people who are at last about to leave us. And who ought to be going out into the future into the brave new world full of optimism filled with the bright promise and prospects of the future, excited, eager to try their hand to improve the world which their mothers and fathers have so regularly screwed up. And instead of this sense of optimism and great moment and excitement, I found last year, as in years before, a sense rather of gloom and doom and foreboding. Student requests for student tenures so they would never have to leave the safety of the university. And a general feeling that things out there were terrible, and that the future was something that one guarded against rather than one embraced or took on. And it occurred to me that this paradox flies in the face flies square in the face of what the Christian faith preaches, what the Christian faith teaches, and what the Bible tells us about our relationship to time and circumstance. So I decided that if ever I was given an opportunity I would try to preach a sermon about the Christian and the future, how we deal with the future, for I would argue that it is only the future that really requires and demands the full attention of the Christian. So today's second lesson allows me to do this. It is a legitimate text upon which to hang these hopes and these ideas. It is the story, not simply of Abraham and his wanderings in the wilderness, it is a story about Abraham's confidence in the future because of Abraham's confidence in God. God who is the future, God who holds the future. Listen again to the verse from which this text is taken. Through faith, Abraham called to leave home and go into a land which he was to receive for an inheritance obeyed, and he went out not knowing where he was going. Through faith, he came and made his home for a time in a land which had been promised to him as if in a foreign country,

living in tents together with Isaac and Jacob sharers with him in the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city which has the foundations whose architect and whose builder is God. For he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. I suppose the question is how does one balance the precarious demands of the present with the even more uncertain demands of the future? And you may ask me well who is writer of our time? Who is the theologian, the novelist, the poet, the philosopher, the psychologist, who has a word to help us understand how to deal with this relationship between the present and the future? Does Doctor Ruth have any counsel to us on this subject? Is it Judge Wapner or Oprah or any other of the oracles most of us depend upon but would be ashamed to confess to in public? How do we make this reconciliation? Well as far as theologians would go I would say that there aren't any that I know of. Most of my favorite theologians are long since dead, and those who speak from the dead tend to speak with a kind of authority that commands our attention. One of these I want to commend to you this morning is St. Augustine. St. Augustine who is president of The Dead Theologians Society, if you will. St. Augustine who is alive and well today because he was not time bound in his own circumstances. Contemporary writers are either terrified by the future or they ignore it. They either idolize it or the pretend that they understand it. They tend to reject history. They tend to ignore the future. At least since the 18th century we have been told that what we see is what we get and we are lucky if we can get that. The impoverishment of modern Christian thought is that it has neither a past nor a future only its own self-absorption with the present. Thus rendering it permanently irrelevant. Don't waste your time on that lot is my unsolicited advise to you. Take my word for it. There is even less there than meet the eye. You want some help for these questions? I've got somebody you should read. Go to St. Augustine. Go to St. Augustine, and if you've never heard of St. Augustine don't confess it here. Go out and do something about it. I'm going to assume that you have just forgotten St. Augustine, not that you never heard of him before I mentioned his name this morning. Go to St. Augustine. He is that randy, sensible, inspired Bishop of Africa that St. of Africa it is he who can help us, the most contemporary of all theologians. And if you haven't read The City of God in a long time I can understand that. Find it in a shrinklet, find it in a comic book, find it in a paraphrase, but read it. You will be surprised how helpful it can be. The Emperor Charlemagne knew all about St. Augustine, and that is why he used The City of God as a pillow each night upon which he slept. Not the Bible, but the copy of The City of God hoping that its truth, its wisdom, might be absorbed in the night watchers. One of the best ways presumably to absorb great literature without a great deal of effort. You don't have to sleep on it, but it might do you well to think on it, and in order to do that it would be a good idea to read it. I'm going to save you some of that labor this morning by talking about it. For here in Augustine these relationships, particularly between the present and the future, the time that is and the time that is to be, the precarious paradoxical moment and the inexperienced future, these things that give us such anxiety such fear, such awful sense of foreboding, these things are given clear and glorious expression relevant after 1500 years even through the likes of us. And Augustine describes this relationship, this paradox between the present experience and the future hope in terms of a title that I had taken today, a title I wish I had invented. Preachers love to be known for their titles. Most congregations don't remember the sermons at all. That's why the title is most important. That's the thing that can fit on the bulletin board. That's the thing you can write on the bulletin, and that's the one thing you can remember through lunch: the title of the sermon. And so the title of this sermon has to do with Augustine's effort to reconcile our anxiety between the present and the future. Consolations and Blessings. Consolations and Blessings. It's a wonderfully evocative phrase. Now I want to commend St. Augustine to you for several reasons not least of which is that he lived in the real

world. St. Augustine lived in the real world. He is no prissy protestant pious soul afraid of reality. He is the one who prayed as you will recall, Lord make me virtuous but not yet. He is also the one who said, "Virtue in the absence of opportunity for vice "is not virtue." You might think about that for a minute. This is sound, sensible, moral theology. Augustine is the one who knew grace because he knew sin even better, and he is the one who as a result of all that reminds Christians that the creation is good reminds us that the creation is good because God, it's creator, is goodness itself. Creation is good because God is good, and God doesn't make any junk. He reminds us that you and I share a goodness because we are made in the image of the good God. This is not humanism writ large, this is divinity made clear in human form and in human terms and that is a great difference between the two. And so Augustine says to the likes of us and all of us who think that we must deny the world in order to live in it, nonsense, he says. That is a false choice. You have a right to enjoy the gifts of God for the people of God. That is what we say in the Eucharist. And he sighs for approval Jesus's words I am come that they may have life and that they may have it abundantly, fully, and completely. The abundant life is the gift of God for the people of God and you don't have to die to enjoy it. Augustine is very specific in what these gifts of God for the people of God are How one can make the most of the present circumstances and you are going to find his list of these circumstances, these specific consolations he calls them, rather strange and rather explicit. The first of these consolations, Augustine says, are important for us to be able to enjoy the abundant life that God has given to us. The first of these consolations that he commends to us is sex. S.E.X. that's right. Here in North Carolina, in the state of Jesse Helms, you are commended by St. Augustine to enjoy sex. You heard it from this pulpit, and even though I will not be here within an hour or two, the reputation that I have just established will linger long after I am gone. Sex is good. Despite the risks of the first coupling of the first couple St. Augustine says it's okay. Sex is alright. Despite the tendency to abuse all of our gifts including this one and to pervert them including this one, sex is a gift, a consolation Augustine says, for living in a fallen world. It is one of the gifts God gives to us for having to live here with one another. I wish when I was an undergraduate in college somebody with a robe on had stood up in the pulpit in a place like this and said that to me. It would have been extremely helpful, and so for all of you frustrated, guilty-ridden people here, take advantage of what I and St. Augustine am about to say. Augustine says, "Therefore God created man "with the added power of propagation "so that he could beget other human beings, "conveying also to those offspring "the possibility, not the necessity "of propagation." Close quote. You don't know how reassuring that is to a bachelor to realize that though the propagation is there and the possibility for it is there the necessity is not. And like certain teachings of the later Roman church, sex for St. Augustine is not merely dutiful reproduction or furtive pleasure. It is also pleasure and joy and it is meant to be so much for grim Protestant Puritanism. So much for the injunction of Queen Victoria to her eldest daughter upon her marriage to just lie back and think of England. There is more to it than all of that. It is a consolation in a fallen world and it is meant to be celebrated and enjoyed. Sex is real and good, and one must learn how to deal with reality and with goodness. So think about it, and enjoy it, and act responsibly and gloriously. If somebody had said this to me when I was an undergraduate in college, I would have been among the most grateful and liberated of souls. You have heard it here. Don't forget it. But the second consolation for St. Augustine, the second consolation for living in a fallen world and living in the contemporary circumstances, the gift we are to enjoy is the consolation of thought, the consolation of the mind. The ability not only to think about things but the greater ability to imagine things, to see things before they happen. To see things that aren't there. That is how the chapter begins, remember? Faith is the evidence of things not seen. The ability to imagine, to call

into vision and into mind the things that aren't there. Any idiot can think. Look at the faculty. Any idiot can think. It is a special grace to imagine. Imagine is thinking to the highest possible power, to see things that aren't there. Augustine says, "Think of the wonderful inventions "of clothing and building, "the astounding achievements of human industry, "think of man's progress in agriculture and navigation." This is no 19th century American progressive or some 20th century secular Rotarian boosting up the national product. This is primitive old Augustine in the fifth century who rejoices in our powers of mind and intellect and imagination and the spirit to do what God does because that is what the imagination is: doing what God does, thinking of the things that are not and bringing them into being. That is what the imagination is, to create and act upon our creation. To celebrate where we are and what we have done. Here, he says it again, "Consider man's skill "in geometry and arithmetic, "his intelligence shown in plotting position "and courses of the stars." This is Augustine praising the environment, praising science, praising raw numbers. Compare this with the Protestant skepticism of human achievement, the Protestant skepticism of modern progress which says in some way if God had intended us to fly he would not have invented the railroad. Such a sorry comparison. So the second gift we are given, the second consolation of which to cope in the irritating present in the fallen world is the gift of imagination, the gift of mind, the gift of creativity. And the third consolation which Augustine mentions is the human body itself. This incredible array of tissues, blood, flesh, bone, all of that anatomical sort of things. He says, "Are not the sense organs "and the other parts of that body "so arranged in the form and shape and size "of the whole body so designed "as to show that it imitates the Creator "as the servant to the rational soul." Augustine sees the body as this gift and grace which houses that quality of mind. Have you looked at a baby lately? How strange and wondrously made they are. Have you looked at an athlete in good form lately? How bizarre it is that all these things work. They actually work. Or have you look at the body as its parts begin to fail in old age and in death? Is this not a wonderful and incredible thing, the body, a consolation in a fallen world? So there they are: sex, mind, and the body, and the world in which they all function. These are great gifts to be enjoyed, to be celebrated, to be shared in. Make no mistake about that. They are given to us and we are meant to enjoy them. But great and good as they are, wonderful and essential as they are, Augustine says they are mere consolations. These are the things that you get in the absence of the real things, the great prizes, this is what you get in the absence of ultimate reality. Sex, a mere consolation. Mind, second prize. The body, it'll do. These things are great, and if you like these you are going to love what is laid up in store for you. Consolations which exist in the absence of and in anticipation of a whole other category which he calls blessings. Consolations, good as they are my friends, are temporary. Consolations are temporary, and that is the secret of their endeavor. Temporary, just think about it. Sex, I am told, loses its charms eventually. The mind, as we all know, begins to go. We can't remember what day it is or who we are. The body, even you young men will discover this, the body eventually will fail you. It will fall apart. Arthritis, cracks, creaks, you too will realize that it's just a temporary blessing. That's all great while you got it all, but when you start to lose it, if that's all you got, what have you got? What is left? Two years ago at a relatively advanced age, I took up the embarrassing sport of swimming. Nothing like what you fellas do but for me it was a great effort. I was taught how to swim by an undergraduate, and I was terrified. I was ashamed of the fact that in my mid-40s I didn't know how to swim, and what would I do when the great flood came? I had to be taught by this 21-year-old Harvard undergraduate and I was terribly intimidated in the public pool of the university by all these sleek forms that just pranced up and down effortlessly up these lanes kicking and gliding and diving, doing all these wonderful things while I was tied to this board trying to keep afloat. I swam with my glasses off, not because

that would mean they couldn't see me but I couldn't see them and that made it some reassuring so that I could get on with my task. But I came up with one reassuring aphorism, as I looked at these bright, able, powerful young things at the peak of their form I never said it to them but I certainly thought it and it went something like this: young men, I once looked like you and you surely shall soon look like me. It did wonders for my spirit, wonders for my soul, and eventually I passed the swimming test. The pilgrim, for that is who we are, the pilgrim is not beguiled by mistaking the temporary for the permanent, nor the present for the future, nor mistaking consolations for blessings. The pilgrim is one who with his consolations in hand seeks the things that last, seeks the blessings, seeks the things that endure, that city that has foundations, whose builder and whose maker is God. And this is God's secret and God's clear gift to Abraham in our lesson. The future is where it is at. The future is the only permanent hope to which we can aspire because it is in the future that one is to enjoy felicity, that is relationship with God that will last and that will not vanish away. Where is this city to which Abraham is bound? Where is this city which God promises to him? Where is this place to which he is to go? No one has found it yet. No one has got there yet. No one has come and told us here it is in Cambridge, or here it is in Durham, or there it is in Los Angeles, or there is it over there. That future, that city, that place remains for us where it was for Abraham. Out there beyond this place, beyond this time, beyond these experiences. The future is that place, and if you like the consolations you'll love the blessings, for the blessings are in that place in space where mere consolations are no longer possible or necessary. The Christian is motivated by a passion for the future, a place that will stay put once you get to it and toward which we move looking forward as Abraham does to a promise that is real and enduring. We live increasingly by the evidence of things not seen. We learn to trust less and less those things that seem so permanent and secure, like money, like education, like buildings, like power, and we begin in our pilgrimage to place our confidence in the things we cannot see and the places we have not yet gone. And of course it is scary. Of course it is unpredictable. It is uncertain, and at times it is terribly lonely. But such confidence as we have is not in our ability to handle, manage, control the future, but our confidence of the capacity of the future to handle, control, and manage us lovingly, gently, and kindly, because in that future there is the presence of the living God of the future. There is that place which has foundations which will last which will not perish away. That place filled with blessings whose builder, whose maker is God. Augustine calls that place felicity, joy, happiness, satisfaction where we are no longer driven by our passions. We are no longer frustrated by our minds and the limits of our imagination, where we are no longer the captives of our bodies. But where we enjoy perfect felicity because we are at one with all that there is to be. The reason that we are Christians is not simply because our mothers and fathers were Christians, and it's not simply because we hope to make a better world. The reason we are Christians is because we know that there is a better world and toward it we are journeying. The consolations make the process interesting, but the blessings make the journey worth the while. Nothing less than this is necessary. Nothing more than this will do. Progress is not achievement, progress is not even success. Progress is movement towards that which is perfect, even as it moves towards us. Consolations and blessings. Let us pray. Oh God, we thank you for the future that place and time in which you are and toward which you beckon us by the guidance and power of your holy spirit. We praise you for this in Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. (church organ) (choir and congregation sings)

Dean: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

Dean: Let us pray, be seated. Gracious God, though we do not know how to pray, we know to whom to pray or to whom shall we go with our deepest needs and our fervent desires if not to you? Amidst a society which values competence and self-help, human potential when we are honest with ourselves we feel so powerless and inadequate to solve our world's most complex problems, to remedy humanities most ancient errors, to right histories most horrible wrongs. To whom shall we go for life if not to you? And so we pray for countless brothers and sisters across the globe who live lives of bleak poverty and dire need for even the barest necessities of life, for those who are ill and for those who care for the sick and the suffering, especially those this morning in Duke hospitals, for those who hunger and suffer from want of food, and for those who bear and burden for the hungry. Remembering the work of Congressman Leland and his supreme sacrifice for the alleviation of hunger in Ethiopia, for people who are held as hostages are prisoners of conscience as well as those who hold them. For those who suffer addiction to alcohol or other drugs and knowing not how to obtain release, and for families and friends who suffer with them. For little children who are born into circumstances where they are not loved or cared for properly. For those who live where war or civil strife rage, where violence inflames cruel passions. Dissatisfy us, oh God with anything less than your will for our world and our lives. Keep our lives appropriately restless and hopeful that your will be done on this earth even as it is in heaven. Keep our eyes straining forward looking for that city of sure foundations whose builder and maker is God, amen. Now let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God. (church organ) (choir sings with music)

- Almighty and ever-living God we give you hearty thanks for all the blessings and consolations of this life, for the many ways both large and small that you touch our lives with gifts too numerable to mention. Accept these, our gifts, as signs of our thanksgiving to you and use these gifts for your work in the world so that others might be blessed through our gifts, and this we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who taught us to pray, our Father who art in heaven hallowed by 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, amen. (church organ) (choir sings)

- The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you now and always, amen. (choir sings) ♪ Amen, amen, amen... ♪ (church organ)