

(lively organ music)

- Grace and peace to you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We welcome you to this service of worship here at Duke University Chapel on this second Sunday after Epiphany. If this is your first visit to the Duke campus, we extend a warm welcome to you and offer our assistance to you in any way that we may be helpful here at the chapel. We also extend greetings to those of you in our radio and television audiences. This afternoon at five o'clock p.m. an organ recital will be presented by Doctor Monica Umstadaedt Rossman, associate chapel organist. Admission is free, and the public is invited. This morning at 9:45, Doctor and Mrs. James Travis began a five week course entitled Preparation for Marriage in Room 211 in the Divinity School. All those who are interested in the general topic of marriage enrichment, married or not, will find this discussion helpful and stimulating, and so all are invited for the next four weeks. Please note the other announcements as they are printed in your bulletins. And now let us continue our worship. (choir singing) (lively organ music) (congregation singing) (lively organ music) (congregation singing)

- Let us pray. Almighty God, who calls us into discipleship, demanding the complete surrender of our whole nature, inspire us with your spirit, that our response to your call may be a faithful commitment of body, mind and soul to the way of Christ our Lord in whose name we pray, amen.

- Let us pray.

All: Open our hearts 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 first book of Samuel. Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord and to Eli and the word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision. At that time, Eli whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out and Samuel was lying down within the Temple of the Lord where the Ark of God was. Then the Lord called. Samuel, Samuel and he said, here I am, and ran to Eli and said, here I am for you called and he said, I did not call. Lie down again. So he went and lay down. And the Lord called again, Samuel, and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said here I am for you called me. But he said I did not call, my son. Lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him and the Lord called Samuel again the third time and he arose and went to Eli and said here I am for you called me. Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, go, lie down and if he calls you, you shall say speak Lord, for thy servant hears. So, Samuel went and lay down in his place and the Lord came and stood forth calling as at other times, Samuel, Samuel, and Samuel said speak, for thy servant hears. This ends the reading of the first lesson.

- Please stand for the reading of the Psalm. Oh God, thou art my God, I seek thee.

Congregation: My soul thirsts for thee

Minister: My flesh faints for thee.

Congregation: As in a dry and weary land where no water is.

Minister: So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary.

Congregation: Beholding thy power and glory.

Minister: Because thy steadfast love is better than life.

Congregation: My lips will praise thee.

Minister: So I will bless thee as long as I live.

Congregation: I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.

- My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat.

Congregation: And my mouth praises thee with joyful lips.

- When I think of thee upon my bed.

Congregation: And meditate on thee in the watches of the night.

- For thou has been my help.

Congregation: And in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.

- My soul clings to thee.

Congregation: Thy right hand upholds me. (lively organ music) (congregation sings)

- The second lesson is taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. All things are lawful for me but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me but I will not be enslaved by anything. Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her for as it is written, the two shall become one flesh but he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Christ. Shun immorality, every other sin which a person commits

is outside the body but the immoral person sins against that one's own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you which you have from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body. This ends the reading of the second lesson. The gospel lesson is taken from John. The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples and he looked at Jesus as he walked and said, behold, the Lamb of God. The two disciples heard him say this and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, what do you seek? And they said to him, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? He said to them come and see. They came and saw where he was staying and they stayed with him that day for it was about the 10th hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, we have found the Messiah which means Christ. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, so you are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas which means Peter. This ends the reading of the gospel. (tranquil organ music) (choir singing) ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- This may be a topic that's open for debate but I for one think that most ministers live pretty interesting lives. Where else could you find a job more comprehensive in scope than that of the clergy? We marry people, we baptize their babies, we visit them when they're sick, we preside over their funerals, and in between we hear about many of the things which are most precious to them in this life. I count it a great privilege to be welcomed on occasion into that very private space where cherished dreams are shared and heartfelt desires are revealed. It is an experience not unlike praying when a person can be that open, that vulnerable so that one can glimpse for a moment into the place which harbors the deepest and most essential human needs and desires. Such a privilege may not come your way many times in your life. I'm not sure that it has in mine. But when it does, you'll be receiving a rare gift. Fortunately for all of us and countless generations before us, we have in poetic form David's version of just such a revelation of his innermost desire in today's reading of Psalm 63. Oh God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirst for thee in a dry and weary land where no water is. With words akin to those of a lover addressing the beloved, David proclaims Yahweh as his reason for living, a presence he cannot live without. Oh God, thou art my God, he insists during what was probably a time of exile in the wilderness for David. He continues in his search for God even as he remembers happier days gone by when God revealed himself at Zion. But even in hard times, it would be no different now for him, desert or no desert for God would not be the prisoner of his own sanctuary, all the while the help and the overshadowing of God in times of trouble continued to feed David's joy so that he could still proclaim God's love as better than life itself even in the midst of the desert. What could have been for him a time of deep despair and alienation from God was in fact a time for praising God. Go back and reread this Psalm 63 when you have a moment. Note the completeness and the depth of David's desire for God, his entire being experiences it, soul, flesh, lips, hands, mouth, voice and life for as long as he lives he proclaims, and thus the intensity of his spiritual experience is equally remarkable. It is a case study in and of itself, involving spiritual thirst, the vision of God's power and glory. Memories of shared worship, a sense of divine love, praise, joy help and deep spiritual satisfaction. In the shadow of thy wings, I sing for joy for his words depicting an image of living parental protection that would not fail him. My soul clings to thee suggests strenuous hot pursuit much as Genesis two depicts a husband and wife cleaving to each other, my soul clings to thee even as God's right hand upholds me. David's religious experience was enough to make any of us envious, at least from the perspective of this Psalm. Even as his soul pursues rest, it rests in that pursuit, always pressing forward to attain and attaining only to be drawn higher and higher

again. Of the many varied concerns that a minister hears about in a given week, one of the deepest is this desire, this expression of a desire to know God though it may not always be stated as such. You see, underneath that suave, self-reliant image that most contemporary men and women seek to project, and with which we are familiar on this campus, there is a longing for inner meaning, one that can present a real dilemma for many people and in some cases even a crisis. In an age where belief in God is not so acceptable as when this great chapel was first built, people are confused about where to turn in their search for meaning. Should it be in my vocation where I can both forge an identity for myself and perhaps make a contribution to society? Should it be in my vacations where I can escape from the pressures of everyday life and have a good time? Perhaps it should be in my wealth and possessions where I can make a statement to the world about my financial success and excellent taste. Or perhaps it should be in encounter groups or religious cults or the use of drugs, where I can seek to rise above the mundane aspects of this life. These are truly treacherous times when we are faced with many alternatives for embarking on a search for meaning. And it seems that for more and more people, they're ambivalent as to whether or not the church has anything to do with this quest for them. At least that's what they say. I do find it interesting though that when truly significant events come along in people's lives, the church continues to be the place to which they turn for guidance and support. Even among the most ambivalent. Take weddings as an example, this chapel is the site chosen by over 100 couples each year as the place to pronounce their wedding vows, and I've been fortunate to know a good number of them. As ministers and prospective brides and grooms are supposed to do, we sit down to talk about who they are and how they've come together and why they want to be married in a Christian context. It's that last part that throws many people. Why a Christian service? We then move along to discuss their religious backgrounds and the fact that they may have fallen away from the church over the years and the present realization that they do indeed want a church wedding. Why? Because God's blessing is somehow needed. This is a sacred moment that calls for the acknowledgment of God's presence even if they're not sure exactly who God is. They can't live with the church but they can't necessarily live without it. And the same for baptism, when new parents have fallen away from the church and then suddenly feel the overwhelming responsibility for this precious new life which has been entrusted to them. They understand in a new way this awesome gift of life and so, they turn to the church. Or, for persons in crisis. Ask any hospital chaplain how strong the desire for prayer suddenly becomes when one's life or that of a loved one is endangered. Even at a funeral or a memorial service, too late to comfort the dead you say but just the time to reassure and strengthen the living, not with mere mortal platitudes but with words of scripture and prayers to God. And what about each of us? Though we might not care to admit to being 'that' religious, there is the fact that we've all chosen to be here for some reason this morning, and we'll probably continue to come back at least occasionally. Why? We have a desire, at some level that we may not even be able to identify, a desire to know God. The 14th century English mystic Dame Julian of Norwich writes of this desire for God as yearning, which she calls the first step in prayer. It comes as a gift from God, a sign of God's yearning for us that we may come to know God and to love God. The soul which is awakened by such yearning must by nature long for its consummation and joy. Its intensity will increase rather than decrease with advancing years, growing with love and never ceasing until we see God face to face. Yet as Julian testified, our desire for God, though planted by God within us, depends upon our continued cooperation for its development and growth. It is not the gift of very many to thirst for God such as David upon waking in the morning or returning home after a long day. If the spark within us is to have the chance of burning, even as an intermittent flame, there must be a time set apart when it blown upon by the

breath of the spirit. Only an occasional encounter with the Almighty in the context of significant life events becomes almost selfish and at the very least, short sighted. Such a life of prayer must be cultivated. It is the wisdom of the church to provide then for regular worship but the church cannot dictate the commitment of the worshipers. Prayer, Julian has told us, is the deliberate and persevering action of the soul. Though the desire for communion with God does, I believe, arise naturally deep within a person, it must be unmasked and that must be done daily. All that would seek to distract us in the way of idols must be put aside, thus prayer itself is not something that we fall into naturally like the eating of our meals but it is an activity which is begun and sustained by the firm operation of our wills. It is only as we embrace a discipline of prayer in the desert as well as the sanctuary, as David did, giving it priority, even over activities to which we feel more naturally inclined, that we should know something of the freshness and spontaneity which Julian herself knew as a sign of communion with God. But how easily we become discouraged when we do not attain the spiritual high of a Psalmist or a mystic who by the way were not always feeling so great themselves. We've heard for too long from certain branches of the church that a truly spiritual person who seeks to know God will always be on top of the world with a smile for every situation. What an unfortunate misunderstanding of the spiritual journey. People who truly dedicate their lives to being evermore prayerful almost always confront a strange paradox. They find God in the certainty of faith and at the same time, must seek God in the darkness of belief. They thank God for having revealed himself and at the same time beg God not to hide his face. God is at once very real for them but is also like a blank wall at times. These paradoxes can be truly painful. They ensure that for most of us experiences of God are neither ecstatic nor exuberant but rather, in a healthy way, disenchanting, denuding, humbling, we are confronted with our own powerlessness rather than success in such an encounter, a continuous falling short of the ideal toward which we are reaching. We feel compelled to do more for God and we genuinely want to but cannot. Thankfully this falling short, however painful, does not have to be ultimately discouraging, however, since the basis of all pray life is the conviction that God is infinitely reliable and that God will never let us down. No matter what we may do, God loves us for what we are. The miracle then is that in all this emptiness, life continues its growth. There is a dryness, a dissatisfaction, yet even these cannot squelch our desire. In fact, the difficulties encountered in a life of prayer enable us to share in the very fidelity of God. God is ever faithful to us and we therefore in the darkness of our struggle remain faithful to him. Because of this faith we can persevere in our desire for communion with God whom we cannot always locate. Prayer becomes not only an outpouring of the heart but a tenacious search for God, an attentive waiting for God in the midst of an interior emptiness. It is an intimacy with the invisible, a surrender, an abandonment, a willingness to do whatever God may ask, a marveling at God's goodness, a love for his word, a deep growing silence whose depth we long to explore, and it is a search that receives its reward in ultimate terms. As I was preparing this sermon, it occurred to me that I have been using language which might seem completely alien to those outside the church and perhaps even to some of you who are in the church. Prayer, desire for God, faith, total abandonment to God, ultimate reward. I am struck by how little attention we actually give to these concerns when it may well be that the future of the church depends on just how prayerful we intend to be. In a time of increasing secularization, the only totally inescapable mission of the church may be prayer and worship. Every other task can be taken on by others essentially and in some cases can be done better than others. All around us this transfer of responsibilities is in process, but notice how the people still come to us, the church, to bless their marriages, to bury their dead, to honor the birth of Christ, to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, and to pray for them in times of distress in many cases without even knowing why they've come. I believe it is

incontestable that faithful perseverance in prayer is a form of solidarity with the world for whom God is often so distant and so vague, and it is our responsibility to do so on the good days and on the bad ones. If we, the church, do not stand up for God, who will? It is only when we choose to remain faithful to God whom we seek but may not always locate that we convey to the world the message that God, even though invisible, is real and reliable and more relevant to our lives than we can ever comprehend. With David as our witness, only in God can our deepest desires ever be met. Thanks be to God. (lively organ music)
(congregation singing)

- The Lord be with you. (congregation mumbles) Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, hope of all nations, hear our prayers for peace in our world. Give wisdom and discernment to government leaders, endurance and a sense of your sustaining presence to all who live in places torn by strife. Pour out your Holy Spirit and your strength upon all who work for justice in Central America and in other places. Gracious God, source of our deliverance and help, hear our prayers for the homeless and destitute in our midst. Lead them to know they are not forgotten or unloved in your sight. Comfort them with a sense of your goodness, awaken our consciences as we consider our plenty and their want, and confirm in us the commitment to minister to their needs, in the name of Jesus Christ. God our redeemer and example, we pray with thankful hearts for brave and compassionate Christians who have shown us by their obedience and cheerfulness and devotion what it means to answer the call to discipleship. Guide and inspire those who break down barriers of prejudice and suspicion, direct the thoughts and words of those who proclaim your mercy and grant courage to those who honor the name of Jesus at great cost to themselves. For these and all other persons whom we name in our hearts before you, heavenly Father, hear our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, amen. And now in gratitude for God's great mercy toward us, let us present our gifts and offering. (tranquil organ music) (choir singing) (lively organ music) (congregation singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (congregation singing) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Oh Lord our God, send down upon us thy Holy Spirit we pray to cleanse our hearts to hallow our gifts and to perfect the offering of ourselves to you through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen and now as our Savior Christ has taught us to pray, let us say with one voice.

All: 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. Amen. (lively organ music) (choir singing)

- And now go forth in peace and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit and may the blessings of God, creator, Christ and Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (lively organ music) (triumphant music)