

(organ music) (congregation singing hymn)

- You may be seated. Let us come before God and confess our sin. First, as the corporate body of Christ, and then within the privacy of our own hearts. Holy God, the earth is yours as we are yours. You have looked upon the earth and called it good, just as you have looked upon us in grace. Forgive us, O Lord, that we so easily forget that we are your children and that the life you have given us is for goodness, beauty, and service. We have gone madly through the world, making of the earth a jungle, a battleground, a slum. We have exchanged joy for riches, human communion for unchecked ambition, fellowship with You for frantic activity. Having sought the whole world, we have lost our souls and we are losing the good earth as well. Save us and help us, O Lord, and restore us to communion with you, and with our sisters and brothers, that we may live in peace in this good earth, which you have given us, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let us pray together the Prayer for Pardon. O Savior of the world, who by Your cross and precious blood redeemed us, save us and help us, we humbly beseech You, O Lord. Let the grace of your mercy loose us from our sins, we humbly beseech you, O Lord. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us Your peace. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, receive our prayer, Amen. Let us give thanks for God is good, and God's love is everlasting.

Congregation: Thanks be to God. (Congregation responding)

- Amen. I would like to call your attention to the last two announcements which appear in your bulletin this morning. On Tuesday, November the 13th, members of the Duke community will have a chance to show their concern for those millions who are starving in Cambodia, our sisters and our brothers. On this day and on the days immediately following, people from across the United States will participate in the sixth annual Fast for World Harvest. It will be sponsored by Oxfam America, an organization dedicated to fighting world hunger. Participants in the fast agree to go without food for a period of 24 hours and then donate to Oxfam the money that would normally have been spent on the food. Tables will be set up on the Duke campus for the fast, during the fast for the collection of that money. We invite as many of you who can to participate with us in that fast on that day. The Faith in the Arts committee will hold a worship service in conjunction with the campus-wide fast. It will be Tuesday afternoon at five P.M. in York Chapel in the Divinity School. Artistic interpretations of the hunger issue will be set in a worship context, and a celebration of communion will conclude the service. In addition, in the foyer this morning there is an exhibition, which is there, placed there by the Faith in the Arts committee. As you leave this morning, they invite you to look at it and read the description of that work. (organ music) (choir singing)

- Let us pray. Prepare our hearts, O Lord, to accept your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that in hearing we may also obey your will. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. The Old Testament lesson is from the 32nd chapter of Exodus, verses one through five, and 15 through 25. "And when the people saw that

Moses delayed "to come down out of the mountain, "the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, "and said unto him, Up, make us gods, "who shall go before us; "as for this Moses, the man that brought us "up out of the land of Egypt, "we do not know what has become of him. "And Aaron said to them, "take off the rings of gold, "which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, "and your daughters, and bring them to me. "So all the people took off the rings of gold "which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. "And he received the gold at their hand, "and fashioned it with a graving tool, "and made a molten calf. "And they said, These are your gods, O Israel, "who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. "And when Aaron saw this, "he built an altar before it, "and Aaron made a proclamation, and said, "Tomorrow shall be feast to the Lord." "And Moses turned, and went down from "the mountain "with the two tables of the testimony in his hands. "Tables that were written on both sides, "on one side and on the other were they written. "And the tables were the work of God, "and the writing was the writing of God, "graven upon the tables. "When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, "he said to Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. "But he said, It is not the sound of shouting for victory, "or the sound of the cry of defeat, "but the sound of singing that I hear. "And as soon as he came near the camp, "and saw the calf, and the dancing, "Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tables out of his hands, "and broke them at the foot of the mountain. "And he took the calf which they had made, "and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, "and scattered it upon the water, "and made the people of Israel drink it. "And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people to you, "that you have brought a great sin upon them? "And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord burn hot, "you know the people, that they are set on evil. "For they said to me, Make us gods, "who shall go before us. "As for as for this Moses, the man that brought us "out of the land of Egypt, "we wot not what is become of him. "And I said to them, let any who have gold take it off. "So they gave it me, and I threw it into the fire, "and there came out this calf." Here ends the reading from the Old Testament. All praise and glory be to God, Amen. (organ music) (choir singing)

- Along with the notables who have come to this pulpit over the years, trailing clouds of glory, perhaps it is proper that there should be an occasional import from the ranks of mediocrity. In preparing to make what I hope will be the proper holy noises for this occasion, I recalled the remark of Dr. Samuel Johnson in the 18th century concerning those who must work toward a deadline. He said, "He will labor on a barren topic, "until it is too late to change it, "or in the ardor of invention, "will diffuse into wild exuberance." Hidden away in the book of Exodus is a story that brings to focus the theme of our sermon today. Moses the great leader of Israel had gone up into the mountain to commune with God. He and his people had been called to a great commission by that divine promise. "I will be your God, "and you shall be my people." And in their wilderness sojourn, Moses had kicked their reluctant feet along the road to their heavenly destiny. When he delayed to come down from the mountain, the people grew impatient. They began to murmur and complain. And they came to Aaron their priest, and said "As for this Moses, we do not know "what has become of him. "Make us gods that will go before us." He then became the willing barometer of their opinion. And in seeking to define God's nature and way, in accordance with their wishes, he fashioned for them a golden calf. When Moses came down from the mountain, he saw the people deep in their idolatry, dancing like aborigines around their idol. He was indignant, and in his anger, he had the idol ground to powder. He put it in the water. And he made the people drink it. Then with indignation he turned to confront Aaron for what he had done. And he said to him, "Why did you bring this "great sin upon the people?" Aaron's reply is something of a classic in the art of evasion. He said, "You know these people, "how they are

set on mischief. "They came to me and said, make us gods, "and so I said to them, whoever has any gold, "let them break it off, "then they gave it to me, "I cast it into the fire, "and out came this calf." Now that answer hardly has the sophistication of Flip Wilson's "The devil made me do it." Despite this little disclaimer on the part of Aaron, the record is careful to indicate that he himself, with his own hand, had fashioned the golden calf with a graving tool. Here you have a curious, ingenious, transparent lie. His is the sole responsibility, yet the claim "I simply put it in the fire, "and out came this calf." Now we see here something that is strangely true to the human disposition. To shift blame. To deny responsibility. To disavow human agency. That kind of self-deception that cuts the nerve of moral endeavor. I am convinced that within our personal and public life today, we have far-ranging variants of this old problem. Within this nation of ours we have gone through the nightmare of men, high in public life, dedicated to the principle that the end justifies the means. Resorting to trickery and deception, and then at the end, saying "I put my principles in this furnace, "and this came out." Or consider the hard-driving professional. Anxious to get on in the world. Suppressing emotion and humane feeling. Becoming a human robot and saying at the end, "The demands of my profession have done this to me." How easy it is for one who has fallen from moral principles, simply to say, "The time in which I was born has done this. "Life has fashioned me this way." Perhaps you have read that long autobiographical play of Eugene O'Neill "Long Day's Journey into Night." In that play we go through an entire day in the life of that tormented Tyrone family. We watch a mother and a father and two sons caught up in the web of alcoholism and drug addiction. There are endless confessions in the play of personal failure. All kinds of verbal duels. But all through it we heard that old refrain, "None of us can help what life does to us." These things are done before you realize it. These are the things we cannot refuse or explain. Now I believe that one of our prime strategies for evasion is the art of making exceptions of ourselves. A classic example of this is King Saul in the Old Testament. We read there that in his official capacity as king, Saul recognized witchcraft as a public evil. And the old king issued a decree banishing all mediums from the land. All witches begone! So he said. But then we read several verses later that as he had come down to the end of this life, surrounded by his enemies, with everything pressing in, his life and his kingdom in peril, he conveniently made an exception of himself. So he called his courtiers, and he said, "Go and find me a medium." And there's that sad story of the old king, stealing away under the shadows of night, to the little village of Endor. In his own situation, he made an exception of himself. He excluded himself from the very edict he had put out for others. Emerson once suggested, "That which we call sin in others, "is experiment in ourselves." Where others lie, we are clever. Where others cheat, we are shrewd. Where others are bad-tempered, we are righteously indignant. And where others are selfish, we are practical. Consider also that we sometimes disavow our human agency by adopting a posture of cynical detachment. How easy it is for us today, as we face the global determinants of our destiny, to adopt a kind of hand-washing indifference. And in the process to turn sinfully to our own self-survival. The care of feeding of number one becomes our prime concern. We become addicted to doing our own thing, with too little sense of caring or conviction, or belonging. I sometimes think that today we're trying to build a society without fathers and mothers. With no notion of any parent except our peer group itself. And therefore, with little sense of owing anything to those who have preceded us. Or to those who have lovingly nurtured and sustained us. Surely in our finer moments we can say with the Apostle Paul, "I am debtor." We need today, I think, what Daniel Bell, the Harvard sociologist has called "the laying on of hands in a continuity of generations." It's a mark of our immaturity that we prattle so freely about our personal freedom and self-determination, with little sense of obligation to give anything back to the world that has made us. A little

poem by Dorothy Parker puts that tragedy in stinging words. She said, "When I was young and bold and strong, "then right was right, and wrong was wrong. "With plume on high, with flag unfurled, "I rode away to fight the world. "But now I'm old, and good and bad "are woven a crazy plaid. "I sit and say, the world is so, "and he is wise who lets it go. "A battle lost, a battle won, "the difference is small, my son." But then is our only valid response to the human dilemma nothing more than cynical detachment? Or some kind of dispirited "Waiting for Godot?" Walt Whitman once mentioned that music is that which awakens in a person when the instruments remind him. I think today the Christian faith provides both the music and the instruments that can speak to this noon-day torpor of the human spirit. Perhaps religion really comes alive in us when we turn from all those merciless distractions on the outside, and look into the very deepest center of human life, there to face that fact that so long as we walk on this earth, we are in control of some measure of potency. We all have the power to stand on our few inches of this earth, and recognize that we are distinct human beings, in whom is lodged a unit of life and to whom the call of God comes to stand up and stand out. Robert Frost puts the question in his poem "Reluctance." "When to the heart of man "Was it ever less than a treason "To go with the drift of things, "And yield with a grace to reason, "And bow and accept the end "Of a love or a season?" Now since I believe that a valid function of Christian proclamation is to see that some things are not forgotten, let me suggest that today there are two points in particular where our Christian faith challenges this posture of detachment or indifference or irresponsibility. For one thing, our life in Christ calls all of us beyond pedantry, beyond some concept of life as a sleek adventure in shrewdness and self-interest to a rebirth of compassion that will address itself to the vast and the imponderable agony of our world. Perhaps the heart of the human venture is the enlargement of sensibility to a magnificent bond of union, and the compassion of which we speak is the communion of being, the burden of being human, bearing the human burden, perhaps all that self was ever meant to be is life in touch with life. In an address given in a Paris monastery, that wonderfully perceptive writer Camus delivered a ringing indictment of the church as he sees it, or saw it in his time. He chided us for our loss of intellectual openness, the loss of prophetic vigor, and he said we have lost the virtue of revolt and indignation that was the hallmark of the church in the early days of her glory. After all, who will label our glib heresies and our cultural idolatries as poison if Christian people have neither the wisdom, nor the courage, nor the sensitivity to do it. The massive injustices of our day call for all of us to be crusaders against the trivializing of life, the dehumanizing of the human creature, and all those false orders that pretend to give meaning to human existence. Perhaps our great tragedy is that which dies inside us while we live. The death of faith, and hope, and feeling, and awareness, and response. We have no control over the fact of our existence. But we do hold supreme command over the meaning of that existence for us. And our tragedy is that we should die and never know our greatest power: the power of love, to give itself for others. Secondly I believe that a foundational attribute of a Christian lifestyle is the willingness and the disposition to risk life. Jesus had this in mind in that immortal classic statement, "Whoever shall save his life shall lose it, "and whoever loses his life, for my sake, "and the gospel's, shall find it." True Christian pilgrimage is always a going out, not knowing where. And asking no security save the garrisoning of grace. It's the kind of thing that Luther had in mind in his great hymn. "Let goods and kindred go, "this mortal life also." Now in all candor, I fear that those of us who live and work in an academic community face a particular peril. Perhaps the real treason in the life of scholarship is not our failure to maintain our minds in a quest for truth, nor even the use of our knowledge for brutish ends, but rather the surrender of the best our minds have told us, our ignoble reticence, our refusal to fight for loyalties, and to serve loyalties, that the pursuit of truth has

given us. Can it be that in our age we have witnessed tragic enslavement of the human mind, because of our indifference to high values and great passions? Well, in the venture and risk of the Christian pilgrimage, we are all sustained by that divine power that works mysteriously through all the drab, and the hubbub of life. As we move on toward our homeland, let us remember that colloquial rendering to be found in the prologue of John's gospel, "God has pitched his tent among us." He has joined our journey. He has left home to go on the road with us. For our Lord came to this world, bringing the strange good news of God's love for us all. There was that day in little Nazareth, when he closed up shop, he brushed the shavings from his clothes, he walked out into the world to call humble people to the only thing worth doing. And even when his life was finally destroyed, the Jesus-journey went on on the Emmaus road, to Saul on the Damascus road, to the disciples after the resurrection, and to countless others down the centuries. We too have heard the good news, and we have joined the great company and the joy of our pilgrimage is that God is going home with us. So we can pray in the words of Maxwell Anderson's "Lost in the Stars" in the song of the old villager, "Oh Lord of the heart, look down "upon our earthly pilgrimage, "look down upon us where we walk, "from bright dawn, to old age, "and give us light, not shed by any sun." Amen. Let us pray. Oh God, we are yet a long way off. But we can love no other journey. As we walk the open road before us, grant us the gifts of the buoyant heart, the compassionate spirit, and minds that are staid on thee. And to Thy name be all glory and praise, world without end, Amen. (organ music) (choir singing)

- Let us affirm what we believe.

Together: We believe in God, who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human Jesus, to reconcile and make new. Who works in us and in others by the Spirit. We trust God, who calls us to be the church, to celebrate life and its fullness, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Most holy God, to you who has created us in your image, we bow before you now. We wonder why, after a week such as we have experienced, we fall so short of your image. We have the living example of Your son, and the living presence of Your spirit to guide us, yet we still live in the midst of fear, ignorance, and violence. We would escape, closet ourselves in this holy place, and piously pray for a world of peace and love. But we know that that is not your will for us. And yet we do give thanks for this hour, O God, for a time to withdraw, for a time to be set apart from the world. We need some perspective. A chance to recognize that there are glimpses of Your kingdom here on earth, even in the midst of the tragedies which surround us. We give thanks for those who care enough to respond to suffering. For those who give of their resources so that others may live. For those who speak out against violence and racism. For those who seek to mediate when there seems no hope of mediation. For those who act to mobilize others to demonstrate their caring. We give thanks for this community and its responses to the crises which surround us. Use those responses to comfort the ones who suffer. We pray today, loving God, for those on this campus who have experienced violence these past two weeks, and for others who are terribly afraid because of that violence. May they experience Your healing and Your peace. We pray also for those who live by violence, who because of their

own inner torments or the conditions of society around them, find this the only way to live. Show them a better way, O God, a way of living with themselves, or of changing an unjust world without inflicting pain and terror and even death on others. We pray for Americans and their captors in Iran today. For grieving families of five people slain in Greensborough. For a funeral march there today where grief and hatred threaten more violence. For over two million Cambodians who are dying of starvation. We pray for those closer to home, even those in our midst today, who cry out to you with their own personal concerns. The needs are so great, O God. As we experience this hour apart as your people, may we not forget that as we pray this prayer, we must acknowledge that Your will is that we be a part of the answer. We give thanks that you have created us to be concerned with and responsible for our sisters and brothers. Give us strength for the task and the assurance that we are not alone. And so we do pray for peace in our world, O God, a peace of which we are a part. We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray saying, "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, the power, and the glory, forever." Amen. (organ music) (choir singing) (operatic singing) (choir singing dramatically)

- Lord God, giver of every good and perfect gift, we bring these offerings now to You. May we give of our lives as openly and as freely. Receive now these gifts, both the gift of our lives and these offerings. May they be used to spread the message of Your love and peace and justice throughout this earth. In the name of Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen. (organ music) (choir singing)