

(choir singing)

Announcer: Sunday, May 26, 1957. Preacher, the Reverend Professor James T. McLellan, dean of the chapel.  
(choir singing)

Dean: Let us offer unto God our unison prayer of confession. Let us pray. Eternal God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, whose face is hidden from us by our sins, and whose mercy we forget in the blindness of our hearts, cleanse us, we beseech thee, from all our offenses, and deliver us from proud thoughts and vain desires, that with lowliness and meekness, we may draw near to thee, and confessing our faults, confiding in Thy grace, and finding in Thee our refuge and our strength. Through Jesus Christ, Thy son, amen, and now as our savior Christ hath taught us, we pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by the name. Thy kingdom come, they 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 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. (pipe organ playing) (choir singing)

Reverend: Let us hear of the wealth of God as is contained first in the scriptures of the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus, the third chapter. "Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, "Jethro, the priest of Midian, "and he led his 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 burnt. "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, "God called to him, Moses, "Moses, and he said, here am I. "Then God said, do not come near. "Put off your shoes from you feet, "for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. "I am the God of your father, "the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, "and the God of Jacob, "and Moses hid his face, "for he was afraid to look at God," and in the scriptures of the New Testament, from the gospel according to Saint Luke, the 13th chapter, at verse 22. "Jesus went on his way through towns and villages, "teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem, "and someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few? "And Jesus said to them, "strive to enter by the narrow door. "for many I tell you will seek to enter, "and will not be able. "When once the household has risen up and shut the door, "you will begin to stand outside, "and to knock at the door, saying, "Lord, open to us. "He will answer you, I do not know where you come from. "Then you will begin to say, "we ate and drank in your presence "and you taught in our streets, "and he will say, I tell you, "I don't not know where you've come from. "Depart from me all ye workers of inequity. "There you will weep and gnash your teeth "when you see Abraham, and Isaac, "and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, "and you yourselves thrust out, "and men will come from east and west, "and from north and south, "and sit at table in the kingdom of God. "For behold some are last who will be first, "and some are first who will be last." Amen, may God bless unto us the reading of His holy word. (pipe organ playing) (choir singing)

Dean: Let us pray. Most gracious Father, whose gifts to Thy children are limited only by the narrowness of our desires, and our unwillingness to receive, as we come to the end of the academic year, we offer thee our humble and hearty thanks for all the blessings which Thou has bestowed upon us. We bless Thee for all who have made this year of study possible, and profitable, for sacrificing parents, whose unselfishness and love have sustained us, for wise professors, who have challenged our minds with penetrating insights, for sympathetic administrators, and loyal alumni, who's work behind the scenes makes our life at college possible and pleasant, and for understanding friends, whose comradeship and counsel help us keep our perspective. We bless Thee for the variety of buildings which have been provided for our different needs, for the libraries, and the wealth of knowledge stored there, for the classrooms, and the understanding gained there, for the gymnasiums, and athletic fields, and the exercise and fun enjoyed there, for the dormitories, and the opportunities of friendship which come from dormitory life, for the dining halls, and the joy which comes from eating together, for the chapel, and the opportunity of worshiping as a university community, and for the solid ministry of the chapel, as it towers over our campus, and for all the other buildings which serve our needs. We bless Thee for the order and beauty of all that Thou hast made, for the wonder of the world about us, for the day and night, for summer and winter, for sun and rain, for seed time and harvest, and for Thy bountiful supply of all our needs. We bless Thee most of all for sending Thy son to be our savior, for his taking of our nature, for his life on Earth, for his sufferings and death upon the cross, for his resurrection and reign, and for his gift of the Holy Spirit. Grant, oh God, that our hearts may grow in thankfulness for Thy mercies, and enable us by Thy grace to give all that we have and are for Thy service to the glory of Thy name. Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent, we grieve and lament that we are still so prone to sin and so little inclined to obedience, so much attached to the pleasures of sense, so negligent of things spiritual, so prompt to gratify our bodies, so slow to nourish our souls, so greedy for present delight, so indifferent to lasting blessedness, so fond of idleness, so indisposed for labor, so soon at play, so late at prayer, so brisk in the service of self, so slack in the service of others, so eager to get, so reluctant to give, so lofty in our professions, so backward to fulfill them, so severe with our neighbors, so indulgent with ourselves, so eager to find fault, so resentful at being found fault with, so little able for great tasks, so discontented with small ones, so weak in adversity, so swollen and self satisfied in prosperity, so helpless apart from Thee, and yet so little willing to be bound to Thee. Oh merciful God, grant us yet again Thy forgiveness. Give us faith so to lay hold of Thine own holiness, and so to rejoice in the righteousness of Christ, our savior, the resting on his merits, rather than our own, we may more become conformed to his likeness, and our wills become one with his in obedience to Thine. In His name we pray, amen. (pipe organ playing) (choir singing) Almighty God, who didst give Thy beloved son for the life of mankind, and hast give us all things richly to enjoy, help us in offering our gifts with thanksgiving, to present ourselves wholly for Thy service, though Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. (pipe organ playing)

Reverend: Sir J. M. Barry, when he was lord rector of St. Andrews University, said this, "while a person might be better employed "than in going to college, "it is his own fault if he does not find someone there "who sets his life off in a new direction." Now we may disagree with the first half of the sentence, though I'm not sure if we do at this exam time, about being better employed than in going to college, but it is true that we ought to find someone in those four years, someone in a book, someone alive, who sets life off in a new direction. We've had men like that on the Duke campus. We still have them. Not only men, women, but the one that I

want to remember this morning is Jack Coombs, baseball coach for 24 years, who died in April, aged 74. Strange man, with strange and yet a wholesome influence. I'm not going to go into his record very fully. I'd like to say this about him though, he graduated from Colby College in Maine, when the Bachelor of Arts degree still required Latin, Greek, and mathematics, and the following week pitched his first game for the Athletics and won it. He won the longest game ever pitched by one pitcher in the American League, 24 innings. He won three games in the World Series in 1910. He pitched 13 shutouts in 1910, coached at Williams and at Princeton before he came here. Now the stories about him are legion, legion at Duke. In the dugout, behind the practice cage, on the campus, in the kitchens, in the hospital, he knew everybody, and addressed anybody. His language was often theological, but had no doctrinal import half of the time, and yet he and his wife, Miss Mary, were powers for righteousness on this campus. They made that kind of a dent. Never came to chapel, to my knowledge, took his wife down for mass, and then he listened in on the radio, and if I were preaching on Sunday, he waylaid me on Monday to tell me exactly what he thought of the sermon. I remember one criticism. He started off, (grunting). I said, "all right, what was wrong? "What was wrong?" He said, "you won the game, all right, "but you didn't start hitting until "there were two out in the eighth." You know that kind of a sermon where nothing happens until the very end, and then boom? I said, "well, you're a pretty poor coach." He said, "what do you mean?" I said, "I wasn't hitting, I was pitching. "You need know the difference." Another day he said, "well, I left after the first five minutes." I said, "didn't you come back?" He said, "yes, with a dictionary." (audience laughs) But there was one sermon he liked, one. Sermon on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He pretended he couldn't remember the names. He called it that Tom, Dick, and Harry sermon. (audience laughs) And therefore to the glory of God, and in the memory of a good friend, and a good man, Jack Coombs, and I hope for your edification, I shall preach Jack Coombs' sermon again. The sermon began about two thirds back in the chapel, on that side, in summer. For nine Sundays, I had the unusual experience of being in the pew instead of in the pulpit. Instead of a bird's eye view of the congregation I had an worm's eye view of the congregation, and I was amazed at the attitudes of some people, surprised at the behavior of others. There are some people who were just not church broken, don't know quite how to behave in church, and for some then unknown reason, they kept running through my mind, those words, "I am the God of Abraham, "the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Now why should persons in the pews around me in the Duke Chapel, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have joined hands in the stream of my consciousness, in an association of ideas? Well I decided to find out, and that is how this sermon came into being. First, who are, or who were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They lived before the dawn of reputable history, pre-ancestors of the Jews, in the fertile crescent, that inhabitable section of land that swings from the Persian Gulf, up the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, across the south side of the mountains of Armenia, and then drops down through Syria and Palestine, across the desert of Sinai into Egypt. They're a father, a son, and a grandson whom history made claim as genuine, but whom legend has taken possession of, and because legend has taken possession of them, they are alive today as no historian could make them alive. Let's look at thumbnail sketches of them. Abraham, pioneer. He broke trails for others to follow. A man of itching feet, never hungered for a fight, but he did do battle and that right well on occasion. Some words from The Odyssey that describe him, what he greatly thought, he nobly dared. He was the soul of generosity, a big hearted man. Nothing mean about Abraham, you could see that in his dealings with his nephew, Lot. They decided to divide the land, and Abraham, who by age and position had the right to the first choice, granted the first choice to Lot, and he did what you and I would have done. He chose the best land, and Abraham never protested. He was devoutly religious. God was at the

very center of his life, everything else was peripheral. He's known as the friend of God in the Bible. Now you'd think that would be a common phrase in the Bible. Only occurs once. Once, and is said of Abraham. He was the friend of God. So you remember how the author of the epistle to the Hebrews described him? "By faith Abraham, when he was called "to go out into a place which he should after receive "for inheritance obeyed, "and he went out not knowing whither he went. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, "as in a strange country, "living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, "heirs with him of the same promise, "but he looked for a city which has foundations, "whose builder and maker is God." There he is, then, pioneer, soul of generosity, devoutly religious. "I am the God of Abraham." And then Isaac, son of Abraham, and a very different person, a stay at home. He only had two real adventures in his life, one when he found his wife, and one when he almost lost her, and that was enough for him. He came home and he stayed put. He'd an infinite capacity for sitting still. He's a gentle soul, the first pacifist in the Bible, you see that from the incident of the wells. He dug a well, and when it was complete, other tribesmen moved in and said this is our well, and he said okay, and he dug another one. Other tribesmen moved in and said this is our well, he said fine, have it, and dug a third one. Nobody move in there, so he called it Rehoboth, room. Good word, room. Expand, you see. Quiet, dominated by everybody, his father over shadowed him, his wife henpecked him, and his younger son cheated him, and it never upset him at all. He had the mildest manners, and the gentlest heart. Well religiously you can guess he was conservative. He did nothing exciting for God. He was content to worship his father's God. If you were good enough for Abraham, you certainly were good enough for Isaac. After all, he'd been brought up that way. He was obedient and passive, stay at home, a gentle soul, a religious conservative. "I am the God of Isaac." Jacob, son of Isaac, very different person from his father. He was what the egg department call an entrepreneur, which is a polite fringe word for a businessman. Jacob is the horse trader of the Bible, the David harem of the Old Testament. He even tried to get God into a partnership by offering God 10% of the gross receipts if God did all the work. Now that's good going, if you can make it. I'm always surprised that that is the basis of the tithe. You'd think you'd find a better one than that somehow. "If you will bring me to my uncle's house, "make me successful, and bring me back to my father's house, "then Thou shalt be my God, "and I shalt give you one tithe of all that I get." Boy, I would too. (audience laughs) Scheming, ambitious, self seeking, yet steady, consistent, he got what he wanted. He was a rascal. This is a different point from businessman. He was a businessman, and also a rascal. He cheated his father, he defrauded his brother, he tricked his uncle, and got 90% out of a transaction with God. His motto was if the world will be gulled, let it be gulled, and I'll help, but if I had to meet Jacob, I would leave my pocketbook and my watch at home. If I didn't, I wouldn't have them when I returned home. I don't know how he would get them, but he'd get them. That is a tribute from a Scot to a Jew. (audience laughs) He was man of religious sensitivity. Two of the most beautiful visions of the contact of heaven and earth are told of Jacob. Jacob's ladder? I think better Jacob's staircase. I never understood the ladder, how you could ascend and descend on the one ladder. Of course, unless they use their wings to get around each other. It's quite a picture, if you want to draw it. A staircase is better. Bethel, the house of God, and a tremendous one of wrestling with the demon of the ford, and wrestling so successfully the demon said let me go, and Jacob said no. I will not let you go unless you bless me, and the demon said all right, if I bless you, I lame you, and Jacob said all right, lame me, but bless me, and the demon changed his name from Jacob to Israel, and lamed him so that Jacob walked hobble the rest of his life. A businessman, a rascal, and a man of religious sensitivity. "I am the God of Jacob." Three very different men, a pioneer, a pacifist, and a businessman. If you were to paint them, what colors would you use? Abraham, well I used to say red, but it's a bad color

now, so let's say crimson. Not Harvard crimson, just crimson crimson. Isaac, oh that's easy, neutral gray. Neutral gray so that when you get far enough away from him, he disappears. He just fades into them. Jacob, black and white, alternately. (audience laughs) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, three different kinds of people, but not the important thing. That isn't the important thing, what is important is the same God. The same God. They were all religious, Abraham devoutly so, Isaac conventionally so, Jacob sensitively so on occasion, but all worshiping the same God. I who am the God of Abraham the adventurer, am also the God of Isaac the gentle man, and believe it or not, of Jacob, that lovable old rascal. Do you grasp now why that text kept haunting me as I sat in the Duke Chapel for nine Sundays that summer? Abraham, there he was in front of me, Isaac, sure off to one side, Jacob, all over the chapel, all over it. I wasn't really thinking of three prehistoric figures embalmed in the early pages of Genesis. I was thinking of the types of men, yes, and the women, worshiping around me in Durham, North Carolina. The 20th century Abraham male and female, 20th century Isaac male and female, and 20th century Jacob male and female. I was thinking of you, and me, and your brother, and his wife, and the cousins, and the uncles, and the aunts, all worshiping the one God. He is still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There will always be a need for Abrahams in the world, spiritual pioneers, men and women who will run interference for God, who build roads between heaven and earth, who challenge legislatures in the name of God, who interpret spiritual truths for men's welfares. Oh, you can name them Paul, and Luther, and Wesley, and Temple, and George McCloud of Scotland who preached here two years, but let me tell you something interesting about him, he ought to be the moderator of the general assembly, he's so great, but I talked to one of the leaders of the church last year, and I said, "he'll never get it, never. "His brethren hate him too much," and this month, he is the moderator. You know why? The Queen made him one of her chapelins, so the Church gave in. Something to be said for Erastianism, now and again. Now and again, and yet all the Abraham's are not clergy. They're the laymen around us who, when religion is stale, reform it. When it's dull, revive it. When it's torn, they unite it. Men and women who carry their religious principles into their homes, into businesses, into schools, into colleges. They don't long for a fight, they don't want to particularly, but oh when they do fight, how they fight for a city which hath Godlike foundations, and then there are Isaacs in our midst, and there always will be. Good followers, the men and women in the ranks. They're not very distinguished, but boy, they are the ranks, and we couldn't get on without them. They used to sing in the Duke choir, I wouldn't say it now, they used to sing in the Duke choir, if the person next to them had a really good voice and could carry them. I wouldn't risk that now though, Isaac, or Miss Isaac. Not anymore. They're ushers, they're stewards, they carry chairs, they wait on table, they're never in the limelight, but oh my, they work behind the scenes. Dependable, quiet, gentle, and religiously usually high bound by tradition. They never receive justice. Abraham needs them. You know why Abraham needs them? To consolidate the gains that Abraham makes. Abraham's so busy away making more gains, that somebody's got to come in, and fill in there, and that's where Isaac comes. Still the God of Isaac. Jacob, oh yes, brethren, you know him. Jack Coombs knew he was a Jacob, sure he did. We all are, if we're honest, except the Isaacs. We're spiritual mixtures, calculating and generous, rascally and religious, cheating and kind. You know what we are? God's beloved scamps, most of us. That's why the prayer of confession is so important at every service, and the church has always made use of them. Think Augustine, father of an illegitimate child, and a saint. Now he wasn't the one because he was the other, but he was both, both. Take Newton. Newton left England. Do you know why he left England? He left because there wasn't enough room in England for him to sin as much as he wanted to sin. He needed room to sin, so off he went to Africa, became an officer on a slave ship, became a slave in this country,

became the personal servant of a Negro female slave, and then he was converted, that means turned around, direction was changed. Do you know what happened? He became the second founder of the Church of England. We sang one of his hymns this morning, Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken, Zion, City of Our God, but he's better known for another one, How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds in a Believer's Ear. How God has used the Jacobs. Do you know why he uses them? Because God needs heads as well as hearts. Oh Dwight Moody used to complain that more than half his converts weren't saved above their collars, that when they put off the old man, they don't put on the new man, they put on the old woman. God needs Jacob, on one condition, that Jacob will take this brilliance, this shrewd ability, and offer it to Him, and use it in the implementation of love. You notice that interesting passage that was read from the New Testament? "You will weep and gnash your teeth "when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "in the kingdom of God, and you out," and then to make it worse, he says, "and many shall come from the east and the west, "and the north and the south, "and sit down in the kingdom "with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." You see, brethren, to be an Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob isn't a matter of physical descent. It isn't pedigree, it's act, point of view, possession of a quality of spirit that's a continuing thing, world without end. What does all this say to us? It's really very simple. It says, brethren, find out what you are, and stick to it. Are you Abraham, and God wants you up front for Him, be you male or female, are you Isaac, reserved, peaceful, conservative? God wants you to consolidate these gains that Abraham makes. Are you Jacob? Shrewd, resourceful, and yet with a sensitivity to spiritual things? God wants you. He can use your head, but he'll first put your head under the direction of love. Find which you are, and let him grow in you. Be honest with yourself, and then having found out, appreciate and cooperate with the others. They supplement you, they complement you. Religion is not a song sung in unison, not at its best. It's a song sung in harmony, which is more difficult, but is richer. The harmony of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, under the baton of God. The same God. The God of all three. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and thank God, even the God of Jacob. Let us pray. Oh Thou who were the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we bless Thy holy name in great thankfulness that Thou art still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and may the blessing of the Lord come upon you abundantly. May it keep you strong and tranquil in the truth of His promises through Jesus Christ our Lord. (choir singing)