

(lively organ music and indistinct chatter) (indistinct chatter) (peaceful organ music) (dramatic organ music)
(choir singing Beautiful Savior) ♪ Beautiful Savior ♪ ♪ Lord of the nations ♪ ♪ Son of God and Son of Man ♪ ♪
Glory and honor ♪ ♪ Praise ♪ ♪ Adoration ♪ ♪ Now and forevermore be Thine ♪ ♪ Now and forevermore-- ♪ ♪
Now and forevermore ♪ ♪ Be thine ♪ (dramatic organ music) (congregation singing indistinctly)

- As you are getting situated let me ask those of you other than the candidates for degrees if you will move as closely as you can to one another toward the center isle, wherever you are. There are a number of people still standing. We would like to make as much room as possible for everyone to be seated if we can. I greet you in the name of the Lord our God who creates us, redeems us, and makes us whole. They who wait for the Lord, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. As we wait for the Lord and as the Lord renews our strength, it is both needful and helpful that we confess our sin to Almighty God. Let us join together as we offer to God our prayer of confession for this moment. Let us pray. Oh God in whose mystery we abide and by whose mercy we are redeemed we confess our sin against one another and against You. All our transgressions hidden and open, the evil done and the goodness left undone, we have deceived ourselves about ourselves and worn masks and not trusted in love, we confess that we have been careful with things careless with persons, adept in taking, awkward in giving, in love without fears and in fear of our loves, we confess before you that we are more prone to sin than to obedience, prompt to gratify our bodies, slow to nourish our souls, attached to the pleasure of sense, negligent of things spiritual, quick in the service of self, slack in the service of others, eager to get, reluctant to give, full of good intentions, hesitant to fulfill them, severe with our neighbors, indulgent with ourselves, helpless apart from You, yet unwilling to be bound to You. Forgive us, lift us up and heal us this day. We pray in Your Holy Name, Amen. Let us continue with our own personal prayers of confession to the Lord our God. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him. To all who call upon Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of all who fear Him. He also hears their cry and makes them whole. Grace to you and peace, from the God of love and forgiveness and reconciliation. Amen. This is one of those glad and joyous moments of celebration for us in the Duke University community. We who have been here for a while, welcome those who view, who join with us for this festive and significant weekend and for this particular service of worship this morning. Those of you from places like Buffalo and Boston and Chicago will be pleased to know that we have weather like this all the time en durum. (laughing) I trust that all of you have already had a most enjoyable and satisfying weekend, that this service today will be a blessing to you in Spirit and in Truth and indeed that there is much more of real, good and lasting satisfaction yet to come this day. It is good for us to be together. It is good to worship God. The guest preacher for the baccalaureate service today is the Reverend Doctor John Vannorsdall who is currently the chaplain to Yale University. Prior to going to Yale he served for a number of years as a chaplain at Gettysburg College, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Chaplain Vannorsdall is an ordained minister in the Lutheran Church in America. He is one whose writings, his sermons and prayers have been published and read widely and appreciated greatly. He has for three years served as the preacher on the Lutheran series of the Protestant Hour. He has been to Duke before and comes back, you will be pleased to know, largely at the suggestion of a number of students

who heard him preach when he was here a year and a half ago. John we are pleased to have you back at Duke and look forward again to hearing the Word which you bring to us for this day.

- Let us pray. Prepare our hearts oh Lord to accept your Word. Silence in us any voice but Your own that hearing, we may also obey Your will. Amen. The epistle lesson is from the first chapter of Romans. "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith. As it is written, he who through faith is righteous shall live. For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men, who by their wickedness suppress the Truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature namely His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse, for although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the Glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity. To the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever." Herein is the reading from the epistle. Amen. (peaceful organ music) (choir singing "Os Justi" by Anton Bruckner) Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the Gospel lesson. The Gospel lesson is from the first chapter of Luke. "And Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has regarded the lower state of His handmaiden. For behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed for He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name and His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered the proud and the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity forever." Herein is the reading from the Gospel. All praise and glory be to God. Amen. (peaceful organ music) (congregation singing indistinctly) Let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God Who has created and is creating, Who has come in the truly human Jesus, to reconcile and make new. We trust God Who calls us to be the church, to celebrate life in 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. Be seated. The Lord be with you. (congregation mumbles) Let us pray. Oh Lord, gracious and merciful God, hear us as we offer prayers of thanksgiving and intercession to You. How good it is oh Lord, to be alive, really alive, and to know that we have a source of life, a source that is always receptive, giving and loving. How good it has been oh Lord, for us to have been and to be a part of a caring community. How good to feel and know the rhythm of life that flows in the warmth of human relationships. How good it is to feel in the company of others, the sense of excitement over new ideas, new joys, new achievements, new visions. How good it is in the presence of others, to experience a deep sense of Your nearness to us and with us. Make us all aware this day oh God, of the deep satisfaction each of these graduates must feel and indeed has a right to feel, that it is okay for us to feel good when we have studied and pondered and learned, truly learned and grown in it all. Help us to know that it is okay to feel good Lord, for this good and memorable graduation day and all that it means to each of us here, each graduate,

mother, father, family member, professor or friend, we do celebrate as we remember, as we rejoice and as we anticipate the future. Continue to instruct us, that we have yet much to learn, have yet other ways to serve, have yet other ways to give, have yet other ways to receive and to share Your love. Oh God Almighty and ever-present, help each of us to know that You care. That You care who we are, how we live, what we do, and who we become. That You really care. We are grateful oh God, for the insights you have given us. Grateful that You forgive us our wanderings. Grateful that You are patient with us in our arrogant ways. Grateful for the sense of direction you give to us. Grateful for Your presence and so in this moment now, teach us to rejoice and to give thanks to You as is our joy and our privilege. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, 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, Power and the Glory. Forever. Amen."

- May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, oh Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen. My hope for the members of the graduating class is simply that you won't bore us all to death and as I begin a sermon, I should imagine that the hope would be reciprocal. (laughing) There is a difference of course, because if you are boring people, then we have to suffer with that for a lifetime, while a sermon lasts only 18 minutes. (laughing) There was a large semi-trailer that was stuck under an overpass. The clearance was something like 13 feet two inches and the trailer was 13 feet three inches. So it was jammed in, wedged. The driver was pacing up and down, the police were detouring other cars around and a small boy came up to the driver and said, "Hey mister" "Please don't bother me now kid." "Mister, why don't you let out the air out of the tires?" The driver looked at the boy in disbelief, then at the truck, let out a shout and started letting the air out of the tires so that he was able, by doing that, to reduce the height of the trailer an inch and a half, enough to clear, jumped in the cab, drove the rig over to the side of the road and heaved a sigh of relief. The whole happy event resulted from the figment of a boy's imagination. I know that we use this term, figment of the imagination, pejoratively, but that's because most of us are afraid of imagination. Figment simply means shaping. The boy reshaped the scene in his imagination. He saw exactly what the truck driver saw. He saw what the police saw, but he saw it differently and because he did, an immovable object, they'd sent for a crane, was driven away. Why don't you let the air out of the tires? If we are going to avoid boring one another as preachers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, painters and politicians, mothers and lovers, activists, it's going to require more figments of our imagination. More of that new way of taking old and familiar things and giving them a new shape which allows us to move beyond the place where we now are. A week or so ago I was visiting in the University infirmary and talked to the man there, a member of the maintenance staff. Now when a chaplain goes to the infirmary, the initial response is always one of two things. Oh wow, I'm not religious or I belong to such and such church. This man went to such and such church, paused and added, "I'm one of those people "who pick up paper on the sidewalk." At first I thought he picked up paper for the University, and then I remembered that at Yale we don't have any such people. (laughing) What he meant was, that there are people who throw things on the sidewalk and there are people who pick up paper from the sidewalk. This was his way of imagining the world in which he lived and I can see him now, on Elm Street, middle-aged, short, slightly bent, picking up a plastic top from a take out container and pushing it into his pocket until he comes to the next corner where the city provides a trash container with a swinging top. Who am I? I pick up

paper on the sidewalk. Was it just a figment of his imagination to see a world of good and evil? Thereby have a way of seeing who he was or wanted to be and what such being in such a world came down to when he walked along the street. A matter of imagination. Wasn't there a song in the 60s with lyrics, something like "someday they'll declare a war "and nobody's gonna come." Now there's an image. A party sure, everyone dreads the possibility of throwing a party and having no one come, but a war? And nobody come. I hope that's a figment of the imagination of some of you. So they let the air out of the tires and then they drove the rig away. What I want to say this morning, is that one of the things we mean by salvation, both Jews and Christians is that Almighty God, if we will allow it, will so stir and shape our imaginations that we be saved from death by boredom. For those of you who are Jews, the metaphor is Passover. A people 300 years in captivity making bricks, and God sends Moses to stir their imaginations. Rise up and get out of here. This is no way to live. Not the way I intended for you to live. Most of them of course, preferred making bricks. What was familiar. They said so when they got to the Red sea and wondered how they were going to get across. Why did we ever leave? They said the same thing when they had no food in the wilderness and they said they preferred Egypt when they got tired of eating so much Manna. Where were the onions they enjoyed in Egypt? Back to making bricks. But for some there was this vision you see. Call it hope or image, they had this image of a promised land and it drew some of them out of past slavery toward a future which was different. Their life was hard, but they were neither bored nor boring people. A rabble, but they were going somewhere and most of us are not. The Lord God Almighty had stirred their imaginations. For Christians, the metaphor is Easter. Just a figment of the imagination. The friends of Jesus saw some heavyweights blow out the candle on the altar. They went away afraid and very sad and after the Sabbath, they came back to put away the candle stick and saw that the candle was burning. There are two things that we know for sure. We know that they said that, that Christ was alive and we know that they drove a lot of trucks out from under bridges, because they believed that. By the illumination of the burning candle, the risen Christ, they remembered everything that Jesus had said and did, but they remembered and saw it in a new light. The information was what was there before. Just as it was for the truck driver and the police, but the information became exceedingly alive and exciting because the candle was alive, the Christ was alive and therefore they now knew that the Dayspring from on high had visited them. Therefore they knew that the last would be first. The master would be the servant. That there would be wars declared and no one come. There would be Zacchaeus coming down out of his tree and giving away his money and allowed to save some for celebrations. There would be speechless people speaking, deaf people hearing, adulterers restored to righteousness, wine for weddings and middle-aged men picking up paper on Elm Street and putting it in the container with the swinging top. The metaphor for Christians is Easter. If you don't like figments of the imagination, say creative imagination. What we find in the post-Easter church is a burst of creative imagination, call it gift of God. Jerome Bruner calls it the knowledge of the left hand. The recognition of a new pattern of truth born of facts which were already there and so the healing of blind Bartimaeus, the healing of the paralytic, the exorcisms of demons and decapillus. These events became for the disciples, in the creative imagination of Easter, not just happy events in the lives of those people, a humane thing which occurred at that time, but in the light of Easter they became harbingers of an eternal Spring. A new creation by the power of the ultimate Creator. They became the dying of an old order. Crucified with Christ. They became the birth of a new order, raised with Christ. They were astonished. They were surprised, shocked by the recognition that they now saw so many old and familiar things in such a new way. Like the truck driver who had been shaking his head, knowing that the tires could be deflated, but not

knowing it until a small boy shared his different way of seeing. We look to the Easter event and to the Passover as specific points of beginning, the unrepeatable event, but we also have a sense of the ongoingness of such creative imagination in each generation. Take children working 10 hours a day in factories. That was the familiar. They had to be that way. It was a given. The factories needed the labor, the families needed the money. The truck driver was stuck under the overpass, but eventually the creative imagination of Easter, which was smoldering in the soot-covered churches of the factory door erupted and it became joyfully clear that if Christ is risen then factories do not need to abuse children. I'm not saying that Christians did it. I'm saying that Easter is a way of viewing the world. An image filled with power to break present patterns of things familiar and that Christians are the people who praise God for Easter's burning candle, held against the shadow on the factory floor. I'm saying that within the last 10 years creative imagination has erupted and we now find it wrong to ignore and hide our brain damaged children and find it right and good to invest our resources to help them meet their potential. Within the last 10 years, the familiar and accepted patterns of relationships between men and women, patterns of domination and abuse covered with sweet language, Chesterton's lies of tongue and pen is now being seen in the light of creative imagination, which puts what is familiar in new perspective, calls it by name. Abuse. Injustice, and makes unacceptable what was once called natural and good. The rod of Moses smites the sea and women and children begin a wilderness journey which will be exceedingly hard, but certainly not boring. The shock, the surprise of recognition is what is so central to Passover and Easter and it continues to break forth in each generation and must break forth in yours. That's the point. Blacks of course, ride in the back of the bus and don't eat in this restaurants or live on this block, study in these schools, sing in constitutional hall and it goes on that way for years and years while Easter smolders in Ivy covered churches and sings quietly in black souls. Until Easter comes to flame and the Christ who was dead is raised in Montgomery. The martyrs who saw it long before and died are raised and white men embraced black men with tears in their eyes and white women called black women sisters and we say, of course. There was a time when educational endowments were seen to be ruled by only one concern. To earn the highest dollar for the school to which they were given. But now there is at least one modifying way of seeing it. The highest dollar, but not if that extra dime is carried on the backs of indentured South African blacks. There was a time called examinations when in some pockets of our culture a man or a woman's whole worth is said to hinge on letters A to F, but for some examination becomes only one part of Easter's world where death by grade is banished and worth is Love's gift and Love is worth's measure. Just as we once said that some children should be hidden some work in factories, that life leads only to death so we still say that competition is the only style of learning, that unions make people lazy, that Ohio companies will not tolerate a windfall tax that the Americans will not tolerate rationing, that nuclear warfare is inevitable, that faithfulness in monogamous marriage is too high a goal, that the only motivation is what's good for me, and we sit here in the pews this morning and know deep in our hearts, that the element of truth in all of these things which can't happen, is a part of the very self that's sitting here. We need not be liars to ourselves. Creative imagination does not mean to hide the truth, but it surely means to see things differently. To live by a metaphor which encompasses the whole of human experience, constantly surprising us by invoking recognition of familiar things and patterns which are now new, which let us move ahead, let us change. Assume that change is possible, to pick up papers on Elm Street. Let the air out of tires so that stuck trucks can be driven away, take examinations without fear of our life. To vest without fear of destroying a University, marry without fear of divorce and divorce, if that be less evil than a given marriage without fear of rotting in Hell forever. Two things are a part of Christian and

Jewish witness that Passover and Easter are forever once historical events which gives shape to the metaphor by which we live. A candle blown out, but still burning. A people freed. These are the figments of our imagination which we acknowledge are not of our making, but gift of God to His people. A way of seeing which evokes new meaning and promise for is old and familiar. The second part of the witness is that resurrection and Passover are forever new events in the lives of some people and each generation of God's people, by which the stone of what's has been, is rolled away and there comes forth a new way of seeing which is full of promise and life. It is the beauty of the possibilities, the shocked recognition of a bestirred imagination which I think sings through the words of the Gospel read today. The song of Mary. "He hath showed strength with His arm, he has scattered the proud and the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things. The rich He hath sent empty away." It is this new way of seeing things which allows some of us to say with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." It is the power of God for salvation from boredom, to Jew first, also to the Greek. Where others of us to simply say, we know we live East of Eden, no way of going back to the garden, but by the Grace of God we do not have to sit here forever making bricks without straw. There is a promised land. Our Lord is the lord of that promised land, luring us out of death by boredom into trouble and joy. To such a journey I commend you and may the Lord bless and keep you. Amen. (lively organ music) (choir singing All People That On Earth Do Dwell) ♪ All people that on Earth do dwell ♪ Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice ♪ Him serve with mirth ♪ His praise forth tell ♪ Come ye before Him and rejoice ♪ Know that the Lord is God indeed ♪ Without our aid He did us make ♪ We are His folk ♪ He doth us feed ♪ And for His sheep He doth us take ♪ Oh enter then His gates with praise ♪ Approach with joy His courts unto ♪ Praise, laud and bless His name always ♪ For it is seemly so to do ♪ For why the Lord our God is good ♪ His mercy is forever sure ♪ His truth at all times firmly stood ♪ And shall from age to age endure ♪ To Father, Son and Holy Ghost ♪ The God whom Heaven and Earth adore ♪ From men and from the angel host ♪ Be praise and glory evermore ♪

- As an act of thanksgiving and commitment let us join together for a prayer, a unison prayer of gratitude and hope. Let us pray. Almighty God who has granted us place and part in this university, hallow to us now this day when we dedicate ourselves to the life and work to which You have here called us that we may remember with gratitude the families and friends who have cared for us. We ask Your presence oh God that in the life ahead of us, we may keep faith with those who have loved us and trusted us and whose hopes follow us. We ask Your presence oh God, that we may enter with good courage and constant purpose upon the tasks which await us. We ask Your presence oh God from all sense of strangeness and loneliness and from the fear that we may fail and may find no friends, good Lord deliver us from neglect of the opportunities which are all about us, and from distrust of our ability to meet the duties of each dawning day. Good Lord deliver us, that the example of wise and generous people who have gone before us here at this university, may save us from folly and self-indulgence. We ask your presence oh God, more especially that you would show to us and to all people the way of Love in a time desperately in need of those who care. We ask Your presence oh God, these things and whatever else You see needful and right for us. We ask in Your holy name. Amen. (lively organ music) (congregation singing indistinctly)

- Go now in love and peace my friend and as you go may you find fulfillment in your serving joy in your loving satisfaction in your working and peace in your believing and may the love and peace of God be with

you and with those whom you love this day and forever. (choir singing) ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen
♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (dramatic organ music)