

(slow tempo instrumental music) (silence)

- The eyes of the Lord are always upon us from the beginning of the year, even unto the end. The Lord is gracious unto them that wait for him. to the souls that seek him. From the rising of the sun until the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised. From the beginning of the year onto the end of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised. Therefore let us sing to the praise and the glory of God the hymn 28, stanzas one, two, three and six. Oh God, our help in ages past. (hymnal singing drowned by instruments) Let us offer unto God, our prayer of confession and for mercy. Almighty and eternal God with whom one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Our creator and our judge, we would not hide our transgressions from thee, we confess vows unfulfilled, good purposes forgotten, opportunities neglected, duties left undone. We have spoken unkind words and done ungenerous deeds. We have cherished unholy desires and living for things that and have sometimes neglected thee in whom is our life and our peace. We have no refuge, but in thy long suffering mercy. Show us thy compassion, forgive, correct, and heal us for our sake and for Jesus sake. Amen. And hear those words of assurance, especially at the Christmas season. First, the word of God to Joseph before the birth of our Lord, thou shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. And the New Testament comment on that statement, this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Therefore be of good courage. (slow tempo instrumental music) Let us hear the word of God as it is contained in the scriptures of the New Testament in the Gospel according to Saint Luke 16:1-9 reading from the King James Version. And Jesus said also unto his disciples, there was a certain rich man which had a steward and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods and he called him and he said unto him, how is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, what shall I do? For my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship. I cannot dig, to beg I'm ashamed. I am resolved what to do that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his Lords debtors unto him and said unto the first, how much owest thou unto my Lord? And he said a hundred measures of oil. And the steward said unto him, take thy bill and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then said he to another and how much owest thou? And he said a hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, take I bill and write fourscore. And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, That when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Amen. (hymnal singing drowned by instruments) The Lord be with you, let us pray. Let us offer unto God our unison prayer of Thanksgiving, Almighty God, everlasting Father, as another year draws to its close we thank thee for the protection, comfort and guidance thou has given us throughout its course. We thank thee for thy goodness that hath created us, for thy bounty that hath sustained us. For thy fatherly discipline that had corrected us. For thy patients that have borne with us. Above all, we thank you thee for thine incarnate son, sent as at this time to be our savior. Bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let the congregation be seated. And let us offer unto God in bidding prayers our petitions

for others and for ourselves. Let us remember others first. Let us pray God for our world. Let us pray God for our country. Let us pray God for our state. For our city. Oh God who has taught us to make prayers for others, we offer unto thee the petitions of these thy servants asking thee that thou would answer them as thou see is best. And now let us pray for ourselves, for our families here or at a distance. For our friends and for our neighbors who have helped us, during this Christmas. For those who are sick in the hospital, out of work, discouraged, despised. Oh God, who has given unto those who loved thee the ministry of reconciliation, help us not only to be thy children, but to be thy servants in this place and at this time. And here we offer and present unto the ourselves, our souls and bodies, our hearts and our voices, our fingers, and our minds to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto thee through Jesus Christ our Lord who has taught us when we pray thus to say. 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 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.

- We are told in the scriptures that the truth shall make us free. And we are admonished to speak the truth in love to our brethren in the household of faith. But like so many affirmations of religious law, it seems that this emphasis on truth is something that we seldom take very seriously Perhaps it's a saying so familiar to us that we have become contemptuous of it. Of course, we pay lip service to the ideal of truth. We run the token observance to it, but we shy away from the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We shy away from the shattering of illusions, which comes when we really engage one another. And what a wonderful concept that existentialist notion is engagement like two gears, their teeth biting into each other so that if one turns the other has to turn too. Peter Berger draws our attention to a particularly excruciating illustration of the bad faith manifested in our retreats from engagement when he describes what usually happens at the end of the typical Sunday Morning Church Service. The sermon may be as bold and as fiery as can be, the guilt or the zeal aroused by this prophetic preaching may be quite intense and quite sincere. But the meaning of all these spiritual power technics is placed in doubt by that smiling handshake that the minister gives the parishioners as they leave the church. This little ritual is a sign or it's often interpreted as a sign that the preacher didn't really mean business in what he said from the pulpit. It's a sign that now people can step out of the church back into the real world, the world where the good intentions expressed and felt during the service really can't be expected to materialize. It's a sign that the show is over until the same time next Sunday when once again, there will be a ritual celebration of the commonly maintained illusion of moral earnestness. Of course, what Berger talks about here is just one illustration of a much more pervasive theme. A group of social scientists who wrote a book about a small town and mass society, described it in these words. There is a silent recognition among members of this community that facts and ideas which are disturbing to the accepted system of illusions are not to be spoken of. In terms of unconscious interpersonal technique this requires that a particular individual have a fairly sensitive knowledge of the illusions held by another person and in interacting with him, he must act and respond to this illusion as if it were reality. Not to play the game of supporting each other's illusions is an insult and is contrary to all forms of interpersonal etiquette. In such cases, the relationship is carried on, on the basis of formal greetings and inconsequential small talk, Of course we university folks, especially those of us who do not mind being called intellectuals, we fancy that we are a notch or two above this kind of thing yet, it occurs to me that those of us who are ostensibly dedicated to the pursuit of truth, perhaps we are the ones who are most afraid of it. And most

guilty of using reverence for truth as an ideological mask for comfortable immunity from it. We know so well how to vaccinate ourselves against the disease of the whole truth by taking small doses of it and handy sugar coat or academic pills. We who are fond of saying that truth, goodness and beauty are one perhaps we are the ones who are most terrified of the pain and the ugliness of truth. Maybe that is especially true at this time of year, because this is the season to be jolly. A time for optimism and good cheer, not a time for sobriety or skepticism. Only a scrooge would frown upon the happy memories of the past, the joys of the present and the hope for the future that are all intertwined at this season. The hope for a brighter future. That is surely crucial to our enjoyment of Christmas. The warm, happy feeling of the Christmas tree and the Christmas table, these lead to the good resolutions for the New Year. And the joyfulness of advent is followed by watch night services in which, as we say, we rededicate ourselves to the most important values of the Christian faith. Yet all of us know somewhere deep within our consciousness that the celebrations and the hopes of the season can be very, very phony. Indeed, that may be the reason why people over 30 don't make good years resolutions much anymore. We have learned to doubt the truthfulness of all those visions of goodness of beauty, goodness and beauty, that dance so merrily in our heads at this time of year. Yet we try to have our cake and eat it too by continuing to play the youthful game of hope and renewal. Even as we are forced to admit ourselves that it has to be taken with a mountainous grain of salt. The pervasiveness of bad faith is powerfully explained as an expression of man's terror of truth in Eugene O'Neil's finest play, "The Iceman Coming". You will remember that the characters of this drama are a non-descript collection of down and outers who spend their entire lives sitting around in a Tavern haranguing one another about the great things they could have done if they had really wanted to or tried, and the great things they will do tomorrow. One man keeps telling himself and his friends that he has very important connections with City Hall, and he could be an influential politician. And as a matter of fact, tomorrow, he is going out and seeing one of his old colleagues and get for himself a position of civic responsibility. Another keeps telling all of his friends that he could have been a great writer and that tomorrow he's really going to get started on that great American novel that he has all worked out in his head. They all have their pipe dreams, their pet illusions about tomorrow, but of course tomorrow never comes. And when it does come, when the main character of the play comes and announces that this is the day when each one will go out into the world and do that thing he says he's capable of, when this happens of course, they are forced to acknowledge that their pipe dreams are nothing but illusions. As they put it, the main character takes the kick out of their boms. They have to face the truth about themselves and they are destroyed by it. For them, the character who exposes their illusions about themselves is the Iceman who brings spiritual death. And it's only when this character is hauled off the stage and they are able to reconstruct all of their illusions that they can come to life again. A similar statement of the same theme is found in that superb movie of a couple of years ago, "The Pawn Broker". The central character here is a man who understandably enough, but nevertheless tragically has reacted to the horrors of Nazi persecution by embracing spiritual death even though he was one of the lucky ones who survived physically. He is dead in self pity and in the guilt which stems from his exploitation of the ghetto poor. In the climactic scene of the movie when it is revealed to him that he has in effect become a Nazi himself, this truth is too much for him and he wants to die. But God does not let him off so easily, his life is spared by the death of another person and he is forced to go on living with a compounded sense of guilt. I think it's interesting to ponder in the light of these thoughts about the truth and our fear of it, that extraordinarily curious passage of scripture, which was read a moment ago. And to read it not so much as advice about what we ought to do, but as a factual description of what we have

already be done. A factual description of what we as unprofitable stewards of our Lord already are. Suppose we acknowledge that being fearful of rejection by our Lord because of our unfaithfulness, we have already made for ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. Or as one scholar prefers to interpret it, that we have entered into an unholy alliance with the devil. What would it mean if this hypothesis should be true? Well, at first glance, there's a lot of comforting evidence to refute this unpalatable theory of truth. We know that we are all sinners of course. We know that we are no different from other men and being a little uncomfortable about facing the truth squarely, but after all we are decent people with a serious concern about justice in the world. And with a fairly good record of action and support of the struggle against injustice. We know that we have not been as vigorous as we might have been and few of us complain to be moral heroes, but in comparison with a lot of other people we're not so bad. We belong to the human relations council or the NAACP. We support the community chest and we try to vote for the right man and the right options whenever an election is held. We are against police brutality, we are filled with moral indignation about South Africa. We favor the alliance for progress. And at the very least we have grave doubts about American policy in Vietnam. So how can it be said that we have entered into an alliance with the devil? Well, let us give the partners of the devil their due. Their hearts which is to say our hearts are often in the right place and we follow through with our good intentions just often enough to keep on convincing ourselves that our goodness is for real. But if we take a closer look at our moral posture and our behavior on a couple of crucial issues concerning which we fancy, we are a little more righteous than the average citizen we may come to a different conclusion. Suppose we look first of all, at our alleged concern for the poor as manifested in our support for typical government or private social welfare programs. We can part with pride of course, to the tangible benefits bestowed upon low income people by many social welfare endeavors. Daycare centers, medical clinics, recreation centers, job training, toys for the kiddies at Christmas time. All of these are not totally without merit, but they're not without drawbacks either for these modest goods may in fact be enemies of the best that we could do. Spokesman for the poor today call programs of this kind welfare colonialism and they are just as resentful of it and opposed to it as leaders of the Third World nations are to European colonialism. For they view it as a means of keeping the poor emotionally and politically impotent. An assistant of Saul Linsky has put forth the following analysis of what he calls the branch offices of the welfare colonial administration in the slums of our cities. There are purely political reasons why a local YMCA in a lower class Negro neighborhood will carry out a perfectly pointless program year after year. The people who on the Ys don't want any trouble. I have seen churches and social action agencies fail to exploit rich opportunities out of dogmatic stubbornness. Mediocre doctrinaire professionalism has littered the poor sections of our cities with immobile, unadoptable, institutional dinosaurs. These beasts can neither feed themselves nor support their own weight. They violate the law of the survival of the famished thanks to a large vested interest in their failure. The failure to attract support from their beneficiaries or to get results cannot possibly be disguised. Failure is used to demonstrate how bad things are and how badly the services are needed. Thus, repeated failures supervised by qualified professionals assure the annual subsidy. An enormous amount of rationalizing is necessary to keep such a system going. The mess in the community surrounding these branch offices is too awful to be covered up. So the justification is that inadequate as they are the branch office staff is the only hope. Well, the point is this, our posture of moral concern for the poor is riddled with bad faith. For the posture and the token efforts we make to act on it through our financial contributions or our occasional action are simply an offering of a few crumbs from the table of affluence at which we dine. An attempt to pacify the poor and

keep them from elbowing their way into the banquet hall to get a fair share of the abundance on which we are feasting, but when I speak about alliance with the powers of unrighteousness, I have in mind something far more demonic than the inadequacy of our piddling efforts to alleviate the misery of the poor. I'm speaking of the outrageous injustice of the whole system, a system which perpetuates evils such as unjust wars, economic imperialism, racism, inadequate wages, bad housing, you know the whole list, because the students in the past few years have seen to that we cannot possibly be unaware of this catalog of evils. We do not have time this morning of course, to document and qualify the truth of the particulars of this indictment. We don't even have time to list them all, but a full examination is not really necessary for in our moments of truth I believe that most of us know that the indictment is fundamentally accurate. We know for example, that no matter how many qualifications may be introduced to soften the blow, the fact is that middle class citizens in our society do get a disproportionate return on their investment of time and energy in society. Disproportionate, as compared with the contribution made by workers and farmers. I mean, the farmers who really bring forth the body of the earth, not the agribusiness men who merely own land and machinery. We know that the food on our tables, the clothes on our back, the gadgets we play with, and even the money in our wallets stinks. Stinks of the sweat and the tears of the people in the Third World and the other America. We know further more that this purchase of our prosperity at the expense of the downtrodden and the dispossessed occurs not only on the national and the international scene, but on the local scene as well, in North Carolina and in Durham To put this truth more brutally than we care to hear it, we know that many of us on the Duke payroll or on a Duke related payroll enjoy the benefits we do enjoy because the cost is taken out of the hinds of the people on the bottom in this community. And of course this indictment applies to the students too. Because even though their benefits may be indirect and deferred, they are equally implicated in the unjust process. Or we know, or we ought to know that those of us who benefit from the moral distribution of goods are also involved in the political evils of the sanctions which keep things the way they are. Considerable way of illustration, American policy in Latin America, where many observers feel that the moral issues are as clear as they are in South Africa or Vietnam. Now, because we are religious people, we are in favor of peace and freedom and justice, we really are. We get just as nauseated as Castro did when we think of the poverty and the swollen bellies of little children in Latin America. We want to see a redistribution of wealth in these countries and a greater measure of democratic participation in governmental decisions. At a certain level our intentions are basically good and it is gratifying to display our good intentions in cocktail party conversation by criticizing Latin American landlords, and politicals for their blindness and selfishness. But because we are also those who are Americans, we want to see these reforms come about on our terms. That is to say without causing us any real inconvenience or discomfort. We like to dodge awareness of the truth that the status quo existing in these countries is really our status quo and that when our government acts to maintain it, it is acting to protect our class interest. We may deploy such action in the proper circles, but we really don't want to see the boat rocked very much because we're afraid that we might end up in the water along with the bad guys in Washington who are steering it. So we trust them when they tell us that the boat is steady on course, and that there are no gullied slaves down below. And we close our eyes to the blood dripping down the sides of the boat. We close our ears to the groans coming up from below decks and we close our nostrils to the stench of the dead. What is true of the ghetto is equally true of our Latin American policy. We cherish unrealistic hopes about irrelevant settlement house programs and we look the other way when the cops are doing their dirty work By our indifference, confusion, ineffectiveness and in action we are in effect winking

at the truth and saying to our government, okay, boys take care of things for us. Just be sure to give us good reasons why, what you are doing is right so we won't have to acknowledge ourselves as moral frauds. So We get what we secretly want, weak gestures in the direction of peripheral reform. And the communist label for anything that promises genuine or radical reform. Perhaps an incident which took place in our own country a few years ago reveals most devastatingly the logic of our attitude toward the dispossessed. You probably recall that incident in Mississippi, where some people who were without homes moved into the barracks of an abandoned army base, but were forcibly ejected shortly thereafter because it was government property. The message to the dispossessed is unambiguous. You are not entirely invisible to us, we do want to help you and we will make gestures in that direction now and then, but you must let us do it our way, in our own good time. And if you challenge our authority by trying to take matters into your own hands, that is a crime. And you will see that the power which has been very slow in guaranteeing your rights can act with much more than deliberate speed to keep you in your place. I think that at some level of our consciousness, we all know this. The question is what is the moral meaning of it for the state of our souls? I think it means that we have made an alliance with the devil and when I say we, I mean, the educated opinion making elites. We have even emulated the unjust steward of the parable in a twofold sense. We have made a deal with the power elite of our society, a deal by means of which we agreed to offer only marginal criticisms for what it does in return for a secure status in the middles of the establishment. And secondly.