

(organ music) (singing drowned out by organ music)

- Greetings in the Lord beloved as we continue to worship almighty God may we join our hearts and voices in our unison and prayer of confession. Let us pray. Heavenly father, we confess that we have sinned against you and against our neighbor. We have walked in darkness when we could and should have walked in the light. We have named the name of Christ but have not lived like Christ. Have mercy upon us, we pray, because we are sorry about our sins and we really intend doing better by your grace. For the sake of Jesus Christ forgive our sins, cleanse us by your Holy Spirit, quicken our consciences and enable us to forgive others their sins against us that we may from now serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your holy name, amen. Our words of assurance this morning come from one of great hymns of the church written by Charles Wesley. How can a sinner know his sins on earth forgiven? How can my gracious savior show my name inscribed in heaven? What we have felt and seen with confidence we tell and publish to the sons of men, the signs infallible. We who in Christ believed that he for us hath died, we all his unknown peace receive and feel his blood applied. We by his spirit prove and know the things of God, the things which freely of his love he hath on us bestowed. Amen. (organ music) (indistinct singing) (organ music) (indistinct singing) Each Sunday that Christians gather for worship we read from the scriptures because they are the primary source of our understanding of our historic faith. The lesson today is from Mark's gospel, chapter four, beginning with verse 21. "Jesus said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in "'to be put under a bushel or under a bed "'and not on a stand, for there is nothing hid "'except to be made manifest, "'nor is anything secret, except to come to light. "'If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.' "He said to them, 'Take heed what you hear, "'The measure you give will be the measure you get "'and still more will be given to you, "'for to him who has will more be given, "'and from him who has not, "'even what he has will be taken away.'" (organ music) (singing drowned out by organ music) The Lord be with you.

- And with your spirit.

- Let us pray. Almighty God, our creator, the giver of everything beautiful and good, on this lovely day we have assembled here to concentrate upon you, to adore you, to worship you, to thank you and to ask for new blessings. We express our gratitude for the fact that nothing in this world is too good to be true. We express our thanks that hard work pays off. We are grateful that art and music can serve Jesus Christ as helpfully as it can serve evil. We are grateful that those who will join in and help in a worthy cause will do so and can be effective, even when their ideas are not always followed. We are grateful for the possibility of personal communication between us and you, that we can merely close our eyes and think a prayer and know that you have received the message. We give thanks for the beautiful world of the senses and for the real world of extra sensory communication by which we claim our kinship to you, remembering the words of your son, that God is spirit. We are grateful that the latest trip of our astronauts was not tragic, but that it was successful. That no one has been left in outer space. Grant us wisdom to know how the fruits of this kind of exploration can benefit all mankind. Deliver us from expending all this money and ingenuity merely

to gain prestige for our country. And we pray also heavenly father for a dedication to our urgent tasks here on Earth where many people live and many people suffer. Which will match the dedication we have given to exploring the moon where nobody lives. Oh God, may it not finally be true that we gave more devotion to solving the technological problems of moon exploration than we gave to solving the human problems of our earthly cities and countrysides. Oh God, our Heavenly Father, as we are quiet in your sanctuary, we lift up to you our petition for genuine wisdom. We would love you with our hearts, oh God, but granted we may also love you with our minds, as Jesus taught us. Help us not to be so preoccupied with the archaic forms of yesterday's religion that we fail to see the new directions in which your spirit is leading us today and challenging our minds to grasp. Grant that we may never be confined to the old wine skins of a bygone day, simply because we do not wish to lose the values of the past but keep us alert to the translation of those values into our day and the needs of this generation. Save us from spending too much time in looking backward. Grant unto us the courage to look and move forward. Deliver us, righteous God, from those encrusted attitudes which would prevent us from entering into fellowship with all of your children. Grant us the humility and the brotherhood that would enable us to enter the kingdom which knows no caste. We pray you to bring comfort to those who are injured in whatever way, whether by the loss of a loved one, by the loss of their stability, the loss of financial necessities, health, whatever. May strength and healing come to them, may they be reassured of your love and your presence and may there be human friends who give them love and assistance. At this time of the year, a time of great stress for students personally, we pray that clarity of mind and good judgment may be given. We remember in prayer those who are planning marriage, may their love of you bring sanctity to their love for each other. Grant unto them patience as they consider the need for making adjustments and may they unashamedly choose high ideals and have the courage to live by them. We offer these prayers in the name of your son from whom every good thing comes, who gives meaning to life, making our own the words he has taught us to use in prayer 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 and the power "and the glory forever, amen."

- Let us continue in prayer. Behold us now, oh Lord, as waiting before thee, we consider things that are just and right and true and holy. Amen. Christianity and politics have two cherished and well established convictions they hold in common. Both insist upon the necessity of being practical and both acknowledge the importance of being impractical. Friends of mine who are politicians, that is, they are persons who have been elected to public office, have confessed to me that they have learned much about political strategy by participating in church elections. I have, sometimes, responded by saying that some of my Christian insights have been clarified through my association with people in government. Today, with a gesture of appreciation to the politician, I have selected as topic of the sermon the well known and often quoted affirmation about politics. Namely, that politics is the art of the possible. The timing of this particular message is probably apparent to all, but just in case you have momentarily forgotten, let me remind you that in this country the year 1972 is another election year and in this state of North Carolina, next Saturday, May 6th is another day called, the North Carolina Primary, conducted by both major parties for the purpose of screening candidates for office. Candidates for offices at local, state, and national levels. This is an appropriate season to declare publicly again the fundamental principle in this country of the separation of

church and state, but to add, that fundamental though it is, cherished by all and preserved though it is, this principle does not deny the political realm a religious dimension, nor does it deny the religious institution its political orientation and concern. My purpose today, on this Sunday immediately preceding the primary election in our state, is to suggest a legitimate and positive relationship between church and state. A relationship of mutual trust, respect and concern. More directly, and as I shall hope quite obviously, as I continue, I am proposing today that church and state are interrelated. Interrelated by the very necessity of the times in the task of dealing responsibly with the personal and societal ills of these days. Now, if the distinguished dean of Duke Chapel, Dr. James T. Cleland, were speaking on this issue or this particular topic, he might symbolize his thought by referring to a great convocation of citizens that is held every election period in the city of Edinburgh. Usually on the Sunday immediately preceding the national election in Scotland, this convocation is held. Now to be sure Dean Cleland's sermon would not be like mine, and of course his voice would contrast with my American accent, but he and I have compared recollections of the Edinburgh convocation. Let me describe it briefly. A long and colorful procession of dignitaries will assemble just outside St. Giles in the very heart of Edinburgh and they move in stately cadence, in full regalia and bearing the emblems of many offices, they March into the High Kirk of Scotland, St. Giles. In the procession, as the Lord promised, or the mayor as we would call it, with him are members of the city council, judges, police officers, business and professional leaders and of course a number of ecclesiastic dignitaries. The service inside the church is essentially worship, involving both candidates and voters, both office holders and constituents. The occasion is intended to remind the citizens of the great city and surrounding region, of their civic responsibilities on the day of election, but also this great convocation of citizens is intended to symbolize a relationship between church and state. The event reminds citizens that there is a religious dimension to politics and a political concern in the religious realm. When Dean Cleland and I were comparing our recollections and exchanging thoughts, I was impressed by his comment. When he said that through this occasion, and similar ones in other cities of the nation, the positive side of church state relations is affirmed and reaffirmed. Dr. Cleland also reported that in his native city of Glasgow additional services are held on the Sunday following the election and that the newly elected city council is brought into the church for the purpose of kirking or churching the council. But what about this business of shared responsibility in dealing with personal and societal ills? What about my topic for today? The art of the possible. I need more than a Scottish symbol. You expect more than a reference to pomp and ceremony. I refer you immediately to the New Testament, to a statement made by Jesus and reported in the gospels at least four times, once each in Mark and Luke, and twice in Matthew. Already in the lesson read earlier today you have heard it. As reported in Mark's gospel, "To him who has will more be given, "and from him who has not "even what he has will be taken away." Now, let me be very honest and believe that you too are thinking honestly and freely with me at the moment. At first glance, and even after you have read it many times, this pronouncement on the lips of Jesus seems quite out of place. He was the man of compassion. He was the friend of the poor. He was the champion of justice. How could he make the kind of differentiation as is apparent in this particular statement? One of my own New Testament professors in seminary days has called this particular verse, a cynical proverb with a spiritual meaning. The late Paul Tillich has called it a riddle. The riddle of inequality, insoluble yet symbolizing a condition with which man has to live and can live. As I offer my own interpretation today, I do not dismiss hastily the ingredient of perplexity, indeed it is this character of Jesus' statement that fascinates me and provokes me to further reflection. At the same time, I am not convinced that this puzzling statement about persons who have and persons who have not

has anything to do, or does not have anything to do, with the art of the possible. One misinterpretation must be carefully avoided. While the statement is like a riddle, as Professor Tillich has helpfully said, it is definitely not an endorsement of unfair political and economic stratification. Jesus put no stamp of approval on social injustice. To use this statement as a support for a policy of keeping humanity permanently separated into one group called the developed and another group called the undeveloped is to ignore the context of the gospel writing and to distort the meaning of the gospel message. Jesus was more sophisticated in his thinking than is sometimes admitted. When he reminded his hearers "that to him who has shall more be given" and immediately repeated the negative version of the same stern law of life, he was revealing his maturity as a thinker and his skill as a teacher. Remember he was in dialogue with his closest associates and he was challenging them to think beyond the obvious. Now, what was he challenging them to do? Was he not reminding his hearers that man's nature, his true humanness, his real self, cannot be concealed. No individual, no institution remains static permanently. You are ever becoming you. To you as you are will be given more of you as you are. Likewise, Jesus was saying that man's limitations cannot be concealed, they are real, observable and indeed threatening. Never underestimate the threat of atrophy. No man is safe from the experience of degeneration through neglect and disuse of his powers. Was Jesus not here insisting upon being practical? Was he not asking his hearers to consider what is workable in the kind of world that separates humanity into such classifications as the developed and the undeveloped, the rich and the poor, the learned and ignorant, the aggressive and the docile, the free and the enslaved? I think Jesus, like the politician, was stressing the importance of practicing the art of the possible. Now, with our attention still fastened on this strange pronouncement of Jesus, let me ask you, each of you, two questions. What have we really found to be workable in bridging the gap between the haves and the have nots? I can remember more elections than most of you before me. And again and again I have listened to campaign promises and repeatedly I have been disillusioned and every campaign refers to the previous one before it, and perhaps to a succession of earlier ones, all of them condemning the successful politicians in office for failing to fulfill their campaign promises. What have we found to be workable if politics is the art of the possible? Periodic elections permit different social groups and political parties to register their preferred changes of power and in power as they discuss issues and candidates but have elections resulted in genuine solution? Very early in the decade of the sixties, the United Nations designated that entire decade as, and I quote, the first development decade. It was intended to provide significant aid for undeveloped peoples in all parts of the world. In a report of that decade, as printed this very month in a publication of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in California appears the following summarizing sentence, remember this was a report of United Nations endeavors over a decade called the sixties. "Now that the assessments are in, "all agree," says the report, "that the gap between the rich and the poor countries "is wider than ever." Our disillusion met with practical politics and practical religion might be expressed quite simply as follows, rarely do we keep our campaign pledges, rarely do we find it possible to keep our campaign commitments, rarely do we implement the idealistic resolutions and announced policies as stated in party platforms, and just as pathetically, in ecclesiastic resolutions. Some of you read the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, he said it very well a few years ago, unhappy country, what wings you have, weep. It is frequent in human affairs. Weep for the terrible magnificence of the means, the ridiculous incompetence of the reasons, the bloody and shabby Pathos of the result. What have we found that is really practical? Many of you read Saturday Review and love the column by Goodman Ace called, "Top of My Head." In the current issue, dated April 29, 1972, a reference is made by Goodman Ace to the small boy who came home from school every day

with a skinned knee. "Why do you fall down every day?," his mother asked. "Because," he replied, "I run faster than I can." Just now at many levels, I dare say, apparently we are running faster than we can and something more tragic than skinned knees is apparent. As a result of our frantic effort to deal with the haves and the have nots we have continuing poverty, continuing warfare, continuing pollution of air and water, continuing inflation, continuing crime, continuing fear, continuing separation of humanity. What about our artistry in political, humanitarian, and religious endeavor? But I have a second question, and just time to ask it and to leave it for a few of you, at least, to think about. My second question is, have we come, at last, to the time when we should consider that politics and truth is the art of the impossible? What we have considered as politically possible seems always to be circumscribed by apparent power relationships. What is proposed from time to time is always judged by the fruits and the fruits are regularly disappointing or always judged by whether the power structure of some agency or some caucus or some tradition or some institution is threatened. Is it time to consider some new groupings of mankind across the world? Is it impossible to shift the emphasis from racial classifications to a people orientation that would cut across racial lines? Is it impossible to shift from national pride and self interest to a greater concern for people? To shift from sex differentiation to people? From denominational ambitions that divide to a common concern for people? From economic success, these are the welfare handouts, to human fulfillment? All this relates to the question whether a more radical and visionary position can be assumed by both Christianity and politics. Our colleagues in medicine have set an example in the fight against cancer, they are attempting patiently, diligently, ceaselessly to accomplish something that has for a long while been classified as impossible. Our space explorers have given another example, the trips to the moon were regarded only a few brief years ago as being impossible. The Czech Resistance movement of just a few years back was another example of the art of the impossible. Now, will you look again at Jesus? The same Jesus who talked with his disciples about having and not having? Also said, quoting from the book of Deuteronomy and the tradition into which he was born and in which he lived and worked, he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." He knew the reality of hunger and was committed to a ministry to poor people, but he was not content with a few handouts and a few temporary expediences, a few political gestures in the direction of poor people, he was primarily committed to a liberation of the whole man, to the fulfillment of every man's potential, to the impossible business of eliminating conditions that produce separation, oppression, and strife. To accomplish his purpose, Jesus did not risk losing an election or skinning his knees. He risked and lost his life. Perhaps he was not a good politician. His constituency rejected him. Or perhaps he was the greatest of politicians. The centuries have judged him to be truly the man for the people. Let us pray. Behold us, oh Lord, as we continue in worship. We plan to sing a hymn in which we shall sing the lines, these things shall be a loftier race than e'er the world hath known. Assist us, oh God, as we reflect upon the implications of what we shall sing. We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (organ music) (singing drowned out by organ music) (organ music continues) (organ music) (indistinct singing) (organ music) (singing drowned out by organ music)

- All mighty God, we now here dedicate this money and ourselves with the prayer that we and it may actually cause some things to happen that otherwise would not have been possible, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now may the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, be with us all. (indistinct singing) (bell ringing) (organ music)