

(congregation singing)

- We are people who too often see no need to confess. Our only confession is that our problems are caused by others or by society. Yet when we sense God's power, God's majesty, God's love, God's presence, then we can claim with 1st John, if we claim we have no sin, we are deceived and the truth is not in us. So let us humbly before our neighbor and in the presence of God, make our corporate confession of our sin, let us pray. Oh God, we confess our failure to believe in the reconciliation of all persons, to you and to each other, and to the suffering we caused by our separateness, our indifference and complacency, our ignorance, our prejudice, our lack of humility, our unwillingness to learn from each other, our bitter controversies, our sarcasm and narrow mindedness, our acts of hatred and violence against one another, our building barriers of race and class, religion and color, nation and culture among your people, our lack of love and of prayer for one another, our unwillingness to rely on your strength, our lack of zeal and service to others, and in witness to truth, justice and love, oh God in your mercy, see us not only as we are, but as we hope to be, may we accept and receive your forgiveness and your strength through Jesus Christ our Lord. Oh Lord hear our personal confessions. Amen. Again we can believe the writer of 1st John, if we confess our sin, God is just and maybe trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, our lives bear witness to this truth, rejoice in this good news, Amen. (woman singing)

- The old Testament reading is from the 61st chapter of the book of Isaiah. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim Liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to grant to those who mourn in Zion, to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called Oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins. They shall raise up the form of devastations, they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exult in my God for He have clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with a robe of righteousness as a bride groom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels or as the earth brings forth its shoots. And as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up. So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. Congregation is asked to stand for the reading of the gospel. The New Testament reading is from the book of Luke chapter 12. And the Lord said, who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his master will set over his household to give them their portion of food at the proper time. Bless it is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, my master is delayed in coming and begins to beat the men servants and the maid servants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him. And at an hour he does not know and will punish him and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive

a severe beating. But he who did not know and did what deserved the beating shall receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required. And of him to whom men commit much, they will demand the more. I came to cast fire up on the earth and would that it were already kindled. I have a baptism to be baptized with and how I am constrained until it is accomplished. Do you think I've come to give peace on earth? No I tell you, but rather division, for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. He also said to the multitudes, when you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once a shower is coming. And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing you say, there will be scorching heat and it happens. You hypocrites, you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? The end of the reading.

- Let us affirm our faith. We are not alone. We live in God's world. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the true man Jesus to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by His spirit. We trust Him. He calls us to be His church, to celebrate His presence, 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, and life beyond death, God is with us, we are not alone, thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And with your spirit.

- Let us pray. Oh holy God before whom all empires in the past have risen and fallen, we give thanks for our heritage which has brought us to this time and this place of worship, we give thanks that we have benefited from the toil and tears of those who have gone before us. And we give thanks for all persons who now work and serve a great personal sacrifice that ours may be a better life. Oh God of wisdom, might and justice. It is only through you that all authority can be used for the benefit of all of your creation. And so we live before your loving presence. All persons in places of authority and responsibility in this institution of learning and those who work for our country and our state, our nation, our world. We live before your loving presence, all persons who have great influence of our wellbeing through the truth they communicate through teaching, the news media and through their personal lives. And we wouldn't not forget oh God, those who quietly work, that others may have time to do this work. Those who cook, who clean, who type, all who serve in any way. Oh holy God, the problem which face us are great. Save us from easy solutions which will be detrimental to your creation. You have always cared for your people. You have been their stay in time of trouble. Their strength in time of temptation. Your word has been a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their paths. Be that to us, for we too are pilgrims and pioneers, and we must move out into unknown places and we must take risk. Lead us in the paths of righteousness oh God. And oh God in the majesty and beauty of this place, we do not seek to escape from life. And so we remember in our prayers, those who are suffering, those who are sick in body and mind and spirit, those who are lonely, who are grieving, those who are oppressed, those who are anxious for food, for shelter, for work, for peace, those whose hearts are heavy because of the burdens they must bear, those who must make decisions which will affect other people's lives, those who feel trapped and do not believe they have a future. Empower us to minister and to care for these people even as your son did, 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 and the power and the glory forever and ever Amen. In February the chapel will have a production of Murder in the Cathedral T.S. Eliot's play. Any of you who would like to work on this production are invited to come over tomorrow night or Tuesday night at 7:30 here in the TRA chapel. On the anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther king Jr's birthday, this Wednesday, January the 15th, there will be two showings of a 30 minute film, Legacy of a Dream. The first showing is sponsored by the Afro-American Society at Duke and will be at 1:30 PM and 116 Old Chemistry. The next showing is sponsored by the Edgemont Community Center and will be at 7:30 PM at St. Mark's a Design Church on Roxbury street. You are invited to participate in either one of those. We welcome the new students who have come to Duke for the first time this semester. And we especially welcome the choir who have returned early some of them just to be with us for this service. It is good to have you back. This is a very special day in Duke chapel because of the presence of so many of you elected officials and your families. The service is part of a tradition which goes back many centuries in Rome, Paris and London. The first service of this kind was celebrated in this country in 1929. Is a tradition of calling to gather people who have a special responsibilities for the governing and the ordering of our society, for our service, for the purpose of evoking God's blessing and guidance on their work. Welcome to you who have come from places all across the state to share in this magnificent chapel a service of worship to glorify God and to seek God's guidance for our work, which is before us, we rejoice in your presence.

- And Jesus said to the multitudes, when you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once a shower is coming and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing you say there will be a scorching heat and it happens. You hypocrites, you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? Why do you not know how to interpret the present time? Or how do you, or we interpret the present time? New Testament scholar John Knox in commenting on these words of Jesus said, it is usual that men do not sense the meaning of their own time and it is perhaps inevitable that this should be true. Only in the perspective of the year perhaps the centuries can the true meaning of an epic be seen. It will not be fully seen until history itself is ended and transcended and we know also as we are known. Surely we know the truth of Jesus' words. We can interpret the earth and the sky. We know how now to predict with uncanny accuracy, hurricanes, tornadoes, snow storms, torrential rains and floods, earthquakes even, we know the temperature of the moon and Mars and the movements of the planets and even the comings and the goings of terrestrial bodies like the ill-fated Comet Kohoutek. We understand the movements of the moon and the effect that these movements have on tides and oceans and beaches and even on nation and continents. Yes we see the cloud in the west and we say rain and it rains. We see the south wind blow and we say heat wave and it is hot. But how do we interpret the present time on earth for us as people, as neighbors, as one family of people, as one of the astronauts described us as he came from behind the moon and saw the earth thousands of miles in the distance and said, surely it is one earth. And then God created the earth and saw it was good. How do you, we interpret the present time? Robert N. Bellah in a lecture entitled Reflections on Reality in America says, our nation has been from the beginning a spiritual community as well as a political community. It has been based on shared beliefs and shared values and it has acknowledged the power that transcends it. At the beginning he says, we were the new Jerusalem in contrast to the Babylon that was Europe, but now it is America that is the Babylon. It

seems to me that it is now winter in America. We had a glorious revolutionary spring, a rich and fruitful midnight 19th century summer. And after the civil war, a long dusty autumn when the summer fruits began to molder, rot and smell. And then sometime after the second world war our winter began an imperial winter, it is winter in America. Even those who hope that there could be another spring, a return of April's green, a rebirth of love and freedom even they have become disillusioned and embittered how do you, we interpret the present time? Robert L. Howard Brunner in his incisive little book *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect*, writes, a pall has fallen over our spirits. There is a question in the air more sensed than seen, the invisible approach of the distance storm a question that I would hesitate to ask, allow did I not believe that it existed unvoiced in the minds of many is their hope for humanity? The outlook for mankind he says I believe is painful, difficult, perhaps desperate. And the hope that can be held out for our future prospect seems very slim indeed. And so how do you, we interpret the present time? Norman Cousins in his editorial in the 1974 year end issue of *Saturday Review* world writes, the evidence is strong that human society is in a stage of comprehensive breakdown. Sensitivity to suffering and to indignity is being dulled. People adjust too easily to brutality and to violence. Poverty no longer ignites general resentment. The need for social justice fails to galvanize. The large cities are rapidly on the way to becoming unlivable life. He says is no longer the highest value. And so how do you or we interpret the present time? Or to use Jesus words again, why do you not know how to interpret the present time? The present time, the present time, this time today, this is our calling, our responsibility, our opportunity, our task, indeed this time is the only time which you and I have. And so we are to interpret the present time and then to do something about it. There's a poster I often hang in my office that always calls me up short when I really see it and the message of it registers on me it says, if we change the world, let it bear the mark of our intelligence. Now I know as well as you do that words of concern and anxiety even hopelessness have been spoken of other ages and other eras. The words of Aristotle, of Josephus, words from the middle ages, words of Martin Luther, words of John Wesley of the early colonists, of Abraham Lincoln, of Franklin Delano Roosevelt have at one moment or another describe the frightening agonizing conditions of their day and of their people. But how often do we use references to other days to escape our responsibility in denial you've heard them. Politicians have always been crooked, there's nothing new about Watergate or the Vietnam war. The poor you will have with you always, we've always had them and always will there's nothing we can do. The late 20s and the 30s were really bad much worse than the 70s, at least were not in bread lines. People of different races and different cultures never have gotten along. Charlotte, Boston, Durham are not really so bad at all. Ever since Cain killed Abel, men have been killing their fellow men. Wars are inevitable and the machinery for war is a must. Sure we can look back 2000 years or a thousand years or 500 years even 50 years or 40 years and say things have been bad. Mankind has always lived on the razor's edge of life and death of hope and despair of meaning and meaninglessness. Then Jesus words ring through, why do you not interpret the present time? How do you, we interpret the present time? Well if the words I shared with you from Bellah and Howard Brunner and Cousins were the only words for today. Indeed if these words which I read were the only words which they have for us today, then I would be frighteningly concerned. But even they have another word, Bella calls for 1976 to be not just a year of national celebration, but he says perhaps make it a year of national mourning and repentance. It is time he says for sober self reflection and he sees our future as grounded in our finding again the ideal of community that was expressed in the words of the early Puritans in the declaration of independence and in the 14th amendment community. Here in lies meaning for the present and the future. Howard Brunner writes, the human prospect is not an irrevocable death sentence. Our future lies in our

ability and our willingness to submit to authority and to identify with those persons whose strengths and concerns focus on the good of humanity. To accomplish a future Howard Brunner warns will require the endless perseverance and the will to live of the Greek mythical figure Atlas. Cousins sees our hope for the future in the predictable unpredictability of men and women. He says when we feed data about crime and population growth and hunger and ecological problems and weapons of destruction, when we feed data about these matters into computers, the computers respond with ominously frightening projections. The Cousins reminds us nothing is more irresponsible than to accept the computer's projection as inevitable. For the computer cannot anticipate a Thomas Jefferson or a Winston Churchill or a Buckminster Fuller, or a Martin Luther king or a pope John the 23rd. Hope has never rested on provable facts. Hope is independent of logic. The capacity for hope is the most significant fact of life. Here in lies our future, our capacity to hope and our firm belief in the possibility that the person or the persons needed to lead us today are somewhere among us now in the present time. I remember hearing Dr. George Schweitzer, who is now professor of chemistry at the University of Tennessee and the research scientist at the nuclear plants in Oak Ridge, and also a faithful Baptist Christian Layman say one time when people talk about the second coming of Jesus, I become concerned. Concerned not that Jesus will come in clouds of glory and grandeur and I quote, won't be ready. But concerned that the Messiah indeed may be among us now or may come among us. And I'll be like most of those in Jesus time, I'll miss the new Messiah. I'm afraid I won't see him or know him or believe him. And I don't want to miss the dawning of a new day. And so how do you or we interpret the present time as a time under the Lordship and the sovereignty of God, as a time for the oneness of the human family of all the children of God, as a time for acknowledging and receiving the forgiveness and the grace of God and then of reaching out to one another. The Psalmist writes the earth is the Lord's and the fullness there are. Jesus told his early disciples go ye into all the world. And so if you know not the sovereignty of God over all the earth and over all God's creation and over all persons then you know not the heart of God's redemptive love and concern. And so we come full circle now to the passage in Isaiah, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted, He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn. How do you, we interpret the present time? As a time of need for sensitive faithful persons, to express loving compassionate concern, to know the human condition as it really is, and to act to bring relief to those in need. For it is not enough just to know that blacks and women and low income whites are denied many basics of human rights in our society. It is not enough to know that thousands are dying and millions will die of malnutrition and starvation. It is not enough to know that hundreds of persons line the streets of a local tobacco industry to be considered for just a few jobs. It is not enough just to know that there are more persons in jail on death row in North Carolina than in any other jail in the United States. It is not enough to know that there are thousands and thousands of North Carolina children handicapped with physical or mental or emotional disabilities and that we have inadequate or nonexistent facilities for them to be trained or educated in our school system. We must act, and act with responsibility, integrity, compassion and loving concern. You remember the story of Dives the rich man and Lazarus the beggar with sores who lay at Dives gate. Dives you remember died and went to hell. Not because he was a bad man or a malicious man or an evil or sinister man, but because as he refused to see and to show compassion and he burned in hell with no hope and no relief. The responsibility to see and to respond does not rest only with those persons who are elected to judicial or legislative or executive positions in our society. No, this responsibility rests with every

citizen. And we know that this is how action takes place in our society when an alert sensitive aroused citizenry is stirred to voice its concern then action takes place. For the simultaneous cries of thousands within the past 25 years have helped to bring about the destruction of so-called separate but equal laws, have helped to bring about the enactment of radically transforming civil rights laws, have helped to bring about the gradual winding down of the Vietnam war, have helped to bring about and to support the indefatigable work of a conscious stricken US judge and a truth seeking US Senator from North Carolina who were determined to pursue sorted political situations through to a cleansing, have helped to bring about the consideration of new priorities of monies in North Carolina, for the poor, the handicapped and the elderly. Yes, the joyously agonizing responsibility of ministry to the needs others is one which we all share, elected officials and every citizen. In the Judeo-Christian tradition my friends this is the way it has always been. Ministry in the name of God and for the needs of others has been the responsibility of all the people. Isaiah's words were not just to Isaiah, but they were to all of Israel to bring good tidings, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty, to open the prison and to comfort those who mourn. And when Jesus came, he assumed this ministry as his own and to those who wanted to find hope and meaning in life, he said you go and do likewise. So how do you we interpret the present time as a time of need and as a time for compassionate concern to be expressed. Bishop James Armstrong, one of the true prophets in one of the true church persons in today's world, writes in his book *The Urgent Now* these words, in the little known book of 2nd Chronicles, he says, we read of Hezekiah's good reign. How did it begin? It began with the cleansing of the house of God. The doors were thrown open, the lamps were re-lit, the sacred fires were rekindled. A young king came to his throne, believing that his nation could be renewed until its spirit could not be renewed until its spirit was renewed. So he called, he gather the religious people of the land, called them to genuine repentance reminded them of their sacred ministries and consecrated them. That Bishop Armstrong says is how renewal begins with our penitence, confession, forgiveness, and rededication with our own personal rededication. This applies to clergy and laity alike. We are ministers together. In the name of the Lord God who made us, redeems us and sustains us, Amen. (congregation singing)

- Here oh Lord, we offer and present unto you, ourselves, our monies, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto you. We humbly beseech you to accept this our offering and use it for the work of your kingdom and for the making known of your love to all people through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen. (congregation singing) We have heard the word, read and proclaimed in the company of neighbors and coworkers and in the presence of God, how will you respond now to the life and hope that are yours? What will you do? We will accept responsibility for leadership in our communities. We will devote our minds and energies and resources to this task of achieving full citizenship for our neighbors. We will pay the cost of this struggle. We will seek to be better informed about the problems and possible solutions. We will not accept the peace of oppression or injustice. We will do all we can to feel the beating of other human hearts beside our own. We will search for ways to be obedient to all of God, to love and care for others. This is what we do. God is witness to your words, Amen. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all from this day and forever more. (congregation singing)