

(organ music)

- Grace and peace to you from God, our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Welcome to this service of worship at Duke Chapel. This is a special day at Duke and I greet all of you graduates, parents, relatives, friends, visitors, and members of the Duke Chapel congregation. (organ music)

- Let us confess our sins together, before God. Oh merciful God, We confess to thee that we have been sinful servants We have not lived in Christ's image. We have loved the old, when we should have left it behind. Release us from our sins of deceit and fear and open us to new beginnings, through your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Hear the good news: Christ died for us, while we were yet sinners. That is God's own proof of his love for us. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

- Let us pray. Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your Holy Spirit. So that as the word is read and proclaimed, we might hear with joy what you say to us this day. Amen. The first lesson is from Ecclesiastes. I have seen the business that God has given to the sons and daughters to be busy with. God has made everything beautiful in its time. Also God has put eternity into the human heart, yet so that they cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live Also that it is God's gift to all that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever, nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has made it has made it so, in order that they should fear before him. That which is, already has been. That which is to be, already has been, and God seeks what has been driven away. This ends the reading of the first lesson. Would you please stand for the reading of this alter, which as you will see in your bulletin, is portions of Psalm 103. Let us read in unison: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Please be seated. The gospel reading is from Mark. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, "If I touch even his garments, "I shall be made well." And immediately the hemorrhage ceased and she felt in her body that she was healed of disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, "Who touched my garments?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. "Go in peace, and be healed of your disease." Mrs.

Lennox, the queer, lumpy cheeked cook was lying dead on the floor. During his rage, her heart had stopped. He stared at her, dead. So this is it? The end? Farewell. These days and weeks the wintry garden had been speaking to him of this fact and to no other. The gray, white bark, the snow, the twigs had been telling him Oh crying shame, how can we, why do we allow ourselves, what are we doing for god sake? Make a move, Henderson. Put forth effort. You, too, will die of his pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain. So while something still is, now, for the sake of it all, get out. Whiskey could not coat the terrible fact. Saul Bellow's affluent, middle-aged, Henderson, tells us that we are human beings, trapped in time, between the tick of birth and the tock of death. Confronting death at its highest level can be an empowering thing. For the reality of physical death, as it presses upon us daily, invites us more than any other human reality, to sharpen our wits about what it means to be human and to live in this world as responsible human beings. The author of Ecclesiastes is baffled by the riddles of life and describes the world as fixed and closed, yet there is an urgency within the human heart to burst out of restricted determinism and delight in the splendors of freedom and mystery. We're drawn to the boundlessness of eternity it stirs and haunts us. It demands us to deal with the finite and the infinite. It matters what we are and what we do and how we go about doing it. Because there is a God, we are challenged, like Henderson, to get on with it. The choices are difficult. God's will is often obscure. T.S. Elliot puts it like this, there will always be the church and the world and the human heart, shivering and fluttering between them choosing and chosen. Valiant, ignoble, dark and full of light. Swinging between hell gate and heaven gate. In the brief passage of time called our life, we may be caught living a death instead of a life. Breaks, interruptions that separate, and divide life from death, the former from the latter, crack the time process into endings and beginnings. Which make possible a way of life from a way of death. Such times of stops and starts and twists and turns are births and deaths and marriages and divorces and moves and illnesses and losses. In these times of jolts and changes, we are offered the chance to make new departures to follow new directions and to let go and to take up and to die a little and live again. Duke graduation is a time of endings and beginnings proceedings are continuing at this moment in Wallace Wade Stadium. Let us borrow from the preacher, some of his poetic words in Ecclesiastes in describing this time. It's a time of gladness, degrees have been earned, work has been accomplished. New opportunities are on the horizon. It's a time to keep and cherish the good memories of the past. It's a time to castaway that which needs to die. It's a time to love the truth and to hate the evil in our world. It's a time to make peace in a world plagued by some 40 wars. Most of us in this chapel are not in the Duke graduating class of '87, but we are quaint ed with the seasons of life with death times and life times. We know about hanging onto the old was safe, when the old has become death. We know about the opportunities missed because we did not have the courage to move beyond what was only meant to be a beginning. In a memorable passage in *Wind, Sand and Stars*, Antoine de Exupéry speaks of those who hide in safe places. You, like a termite, built your peace by blocking up with cement every chink and cranny through which the light might pierce. You rolled yourself up into a ball in your genteel security, in routine, in the stifling conventions of provincial life, Now the clay of which you were shaped has dried and hardened, and naught in you will ever awaken the sleeping musician, the poet, the astronomer that possibly inhabited you in the beginning. The Easter season is a time of awakening. A time of proclaiming the good news of the resurrection, the living presence of Christ, and the promises that it brings to us. Yet, we live in the tension between death and resurrection between faith and unfaith, between the yet and the not yet, between certainty and uncertainty. A young, contemporary German poet has caught something of a predicament in which we find ourselves. Smash the shop windows of our archaic civilization with the stones given us when

we ask for bread. We want back our blood drawn from us, our language denied us, our love stolen from us. We want to see again with our eyes that have been blindfolded. We want back our peace ripped from us, our song silenced, our youth taken away. It's a tough time to be alive. In this nuclear age, we fear for our lives and for those of the next generations. Perhaps our greatest challenge is to be open to the future which God will give us. For if there is a future, it will be given to us only by the grace and by the mercy of God. Another shocking story tells us of this truth. This one, from the gospel of Mark. There was a woman, namely she is, though tradition has given her two names, Veronica and Bernice. Like Henderson, she was trapped in her own private hell. Her world was a terrible mess. The smooth face of youth had turned into the lined face of misery. For 12 long years, she had suffered from severe hemorrhaging. The symptoms of such a case are described in a first century work on gynecology. She is pale, wastes away, lacks appetite, breathless, with swollen feet. Those years had taken their toll. Her purse was empty, her medical bills had drained her account. She was not better, she was worse. What was she to do? What would become of her? If she were Jewish, and most scholars think that she was, she had been denied community because of her condition. She was castaway from all that had once been meaningful to her. Did God really make those laws which required them to do so? Which had come down from so long ago, ritual uncleanness meant excluding people from worship and community on the basis of physical conditions. Surely, a loving God would not have dealt with her so harshly. Why should her biological difference be a curse? God had made her a woman. Did that warrant being shut out because of her illness? The Psalm of so long ago had said, "the Lord healeth the broken in heart "and bindeth up their wounds." She had heard of him. Could it be true? The stories of his acts of power. This man, Jesus, had treated women with gentleness and kindness, but then he treated all persons that way, so the rumors say. You know the story. She painstakingly made her way down the crowded street, where he was passing. Could she get to him? If so, she knew that he could somehow help her, do something for her, make her well, the text says. She came up behind him and reached for him and she caught his robe for a second. It was like lightning. She knew and he knew that something had happened. But no one else knew. And then he spoke, "Who touched my garments?" Timidly, she came forward and fell before him. Her bottled up emotions were released from her trembling lips. It all tumbled out, the whole truth. She was awed and overwhelmed by his amazing power. The tender, wondrous words of Jesus gave her permission to enter into a new existence. My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your trouble. The new communities from which Mark, Matthew, and Luke wrote all recorded her story. They wanted everyone to know what kind of a man Jesus was. The man who ate, the man who cried, the man who loved, the man who died. Yet, who was the son of God who lived and who cared that people hurt, that people bleed, that people need. The stories of Henderson and the unknown woman have one thing in common, the openness to a new life. A new beginning, a new future. Lives, which are hopeless, become lives full of promise. God is the giver of such a gift. Thanks be to God. (organ music)  
The Lord be with you

- And also with you.

- Let us pray. O gracious, God. You have shown us your healing love in your son, Jesus Christ, who stopped to speak to an unknown woman in a crowded street. And in her distress, saved her from a living death. Grant us the grace to turn to you, even as she did, in all of our miseries and heartbreaks, trusting that you will be faithful to offer us healing and a new beginning. Today, we remember the women of the world. To those

who have known the joys of being a mother give them the strength and the grace to guide and love their children so that they may become your sons and daughters. To those who are loveless and lonely, we ask your comfort and peace. To the graduates here, and in college and universities across the land, grant the courage they need to apply the truth in the practice of their new professions. May they dedicate themselves to bringing good will and peace to this world. We pray for our nation, which has been besieged with reports of intrigue, unfaithfulness, corruption, and deceit. Help us not to become self-righteous, but neither let us become unconscious of our responsibilities to live as becoming a Christian. We pray for people everywhere, in all of their needs, the sick, the hungry, the dying. May they be upheld by your redeeming love. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen. In gratitude, for the wondrous gifts which God has given to us, let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God. (soft music)

- We give you thanks and praise for who you are, O God. For this day of joy and celebration we are grateful and express to you now our love and appreciation for the bounty which has been given to us, in Christ's name we pray, Amen. (upbeat organ music)