

(choir sings indistinctly)

(uplifting music) (choir sings indistinctly) ♪ Amen ♪

- Beloved, let us offer unto God now our prayer of confession. Almighty Father, we do recognize our need of confessing our sinful ways, because we often have not taken upon ourselves the yolk of obedience. And when we have taken it, we did not take it with joy, as the scriptures have taught us. We really have not loved thee with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We certainly have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We confess unto thee that we often have sought to reap the fruits of success without toil. We have tried to make our way through life by appropriating unto ourselves the achievements of others. Through the storms of life, we sometimes have attempted to stand on our feet without spending time on our knees. We have taken too lightly the threat to thy people which evil has posed. And we carelessly have allowed men of small vision to make great decisions for mankind. Oh God, we have sinned against thee, and are not worthy to be called thy children, But thou, oh Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare those who confess and repent of their sins. Restore us according to the promises declared in Jesus Christ, that we may henceforth praise and glorify thy holy name. Amen. The scriptures offer comfort to those who are contrite, who wish to be better than they are, who like to be the way Christ is, who want forgiveness. And we are offered what is called the water of life. And Jesus said, "He who comes to me will never thirst, for the water that I give him will be within him, a spring of water, welling up unto everlasting life." May it be so for each of us. And because we have been forgiven, we are grateful. Let us now express our gratitude to God by joining together with heart and voice in praying our unison prayer of thanksgiving. Let us pray. Almighty God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, we give you thanks for this day and your love. We thank you for friends who cheer our souls, for honest toil which challenges our best, for parents and home, for the hills, the valleys, and the plains, for the sea that is wonderful in its stillness and wonderful in its storm. We are grateful for the changing seasons and all the beauties and mysteries of nature. We appreciate the joy that heightens all life, and the faith which can sustain us in grief. We thank you for health and for courage to be steadfast through illness. Above all, our Father, we thank for the gift of Jesus of Nazareth, your son, our Lord. Amen. (gentle music) (choir sings indistinctly) Let us now hear the reading of the word of God. The lesson for today is the first 12 verses, chapter 14, Paul's letter to the Romans. I'm reading from the New English Bible. "If a man is weak in his faith, you must accept him without attempting to settle doubtful points. For instance, one man will have faith enough to eat all kinds of food, while a weaker man eats only vegetables. The man who eats must not hold in contempt the man who does not. And he who does not eat must not pass judgment on the one who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to pass judgment on someone else's servant? Whether he stands or falls is his own master's business. And stand, he will, because his master has power to enable him to stand. Again, this man regards one day more highly than another, while that man regards all days alike. On such a point, everyone should have reached conviction in his own mind. He who respects the day has the Lord in mind in doing so. He who eats meat has the Lord in mind when he eats, since he gives thanks to God. He who abstains has the Lord in mind no less since he too gives thanks to God. For no one of us lives equally, no one of us dies for himself alone. If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord.

Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord. This is why Christ died and came to life again, to establish his lordship over dead and living. You, sir, why do you pass judgment on your brother? And you, sir, why do you hold your brother in contempt? We shall all stand before God's tribunal. For scripture says, 'as I live,' says the Lord, 'to me, every knee shall bow, and every tongue acknowledge God.' So you see, each of us will have to answer for himself." (uplifting music) (choir sings indistinctly) The Lord be with you. (congregation speaks indistinctly)

- Let us pray. Almighty God, we have expressed to you in this service our thanksgiving for blessings that are present and blessings that are passed. All ready now, we come to ask for new blessings, which we have not yet received. We left our intercessions for those of our number who are aware of failure. For those who have tried, really tried but failed. We pray for those who, having failed, tried again and failed again. Give them vision to see that in this life, through thee and by thy power, no failure needs to be final or fatal. Grant unto them courage and strength to try once more. We pray for those, oh God, who lead thy church at whatever level, as layman, as ministers, as overseers, that in their leadership of men, they may be following Christ. We intercede for of those who give leadership in our government at every level in the political world. Grant them wisdom enough to be statesman and strengthen their resolve to put aside cheap politics in favor of helpful politics. Grant unto them courage to see the world as Jesus Christ sees it. Oh thou, who are the conqueror of death and the Lord of life, we remember before thee now our faculty colleague, Dr. Elias Torah, whose death has made us sad, but whose academic service has blessed us. We pray that comfort and a glad memory may come to his family and to the many students who studied Spanish under him. Bless all of us that from his death, we may derive those thoughts and come to those decisions which shall make us strong in the Lord. Oh God, We pray thee to lift our eyes above the petty technicalities which often obscure our vision of great issues, make us unwilling to see justice triumph on our campus, in our nation, or in our world, without our having made a significant contribution to its victory. And in that spirit, we pray for peace on Earth, for wisdom to know how to avoid war. Give us the mind and the spirit of the prince of peace. We make our prayer in the name and in the spirit of him when he taught his disciples and all men to pray, saying, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed would 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.

- Once again, one verse from Romans and the passage you've heard. If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Let us pray. Almighty God, our Father, in the quiet and beauty of these moments, may there be for each of us, a voice that is heard within, a voice not our own, a voice not given for human ears, but thine own thought revealed to us. Amen. When Paul wrote those words we now call the 14th chapter of Romans, he was trying to encourage a harmony among a people, the people of the Christian way, who had some conscientious disagreement about the details of that way. The chief source of disagreement seemed to be the understandings about what might and might not be eaten. But for Paul finally declares, for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he has stated his thesis better already in those words that said, if we live, we live for the Lord, if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord. The essential matter is the nature of Lordship over our lives. Father Thomas Merton, in his book,

"Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander," said, "I have the immense joy of being man." And he capitalizes those three letters of the word. "I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God himself became incarnate. If only everybody could realize this, but it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun." The truth of Father Merton's statement confirms our suspicion that the human person does not automatically either is best, his wisest, or his holiest, nor is most fully awake. What he finally becomes determines, depends not so much upon the accidents of his birth or his environment, as upon the nature of the contract he makes with the life-giving elemental forces of the universe. A contract of placid mediocrity will lead to the "Hollow Men" of T.S. Elliot, whose only monument will be a thousand miles of (indistinct) highway and an equal number of lost golf balls. The contract of self love will create a ravaging man, who, when the contract is finally run out at last, is left without assets. A contract with power as its own goal will lead to a bleeding of the great powers from human life. The contract we make is our own. No other makes it for us. It is not forced upon us. It is our own. While the sun shines upon all without choice of favorite, and magnetic lines of force affect life without discrimination, and the cosmic rays come upon us all without choice, every man walks in that shower of spiritual influence that it chooses to be responsive to. Therefore, it is not every man that walks in the holy shower of the influence of God. It can't surprise us then, I think, that not every person shows forth joy from his face, not even all those of us who claim to be practicing Christians. Our joyous faith is pretentious and unreal until we have entered into a contract of joy with God in Christ. Let me give you two very simple examples of contracts not entered into. I think you'll see more clearly what I'm trying to get at in this concept of a contract of joy. The first example has to do with a man a friend of mine reported to me. This man is a superintendent of a small Sunday school, and a Sunday school in which they still have what some of you may recall the opening exercises. In the earlier days, almost every Sunday school began with opening exercises, where all the members of the school gathered together, whatever the age may have been. And the superintendent led the mornings devotions before the classes were assembled individually. The superintendent was speaking before the opening assembly. And he spoke in very low, discouraged, pessimistic, sepulchral tones, and gave this little speech. "My friends," he said, "I decided a long time ago that if there's one thing this Sunday school really needs, its enthusiasm." The other example has to do with another man, a friend who is quite well along his profession, and who, at one time, was elected the state president of his professional society. But the man has a characteristic attitude toward life, it seems to assume that the worst is happening and is going to continue to happen, and the whole universe was created just to constitute a continuing affront to him personally. All bad things come to him. Nothing good is in prospect. I had some misgivings about his going to preside over the annual meeting of his professional society. When he came back, I inquired how it went. And he had one of those voices too, and he said, "Phil, it was marvelous." He said, "I presided, you know, and I started off by telling several very funny stories." He said, "You know, I have a very keen sense of humor." Now, the first of these men, I must maintain, had no contract with enthusiasm. And when he spoke about wanting it for his church school, he spoke with a degree of falsity. The second man, a man I am certain would not have known a joke had he met it in the middle of the big road. He had no familiarity with humor, much less a contract with humor. Likewise, there are those of us in the Christian Church who claim the great joyous Christian faith, and yet, have no real acquaintance with what that faith is nor the joy that arises out of it, for we have not made that contract, that contract with Christ. It was God in Christ that brings us the lasting joy. Now, when it comes to us, this releasing contract of joy, out of which a man can speak his bold security, saying, if we live, we live for the

Lord, if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord. It must begin, I think, with a discovered Lord with whom we enter into covenant. Now, here, let us see that already, we and all men are subjects to the Lords we have accepted. And our minds, our bodies, and our spirits already genuflect to the altar of some God. For persons, as practicing humans, there is available a whole galaxy of Lords. And every man chooses from the galaxy his own Lord, even if by the process of elimination or in adoption by prior defaultings of faith. Each person chooses a radiant shower within which he will walk. Every person here, consciously or unconsciously, has decided upon a Lord of some kind to whom is yielded that loyalty, which is the last one he would be willing to surrender. Paul must have known that until the rivalries of the various groups of Christians were submerged in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, they would continue to separate the Christian brethren. He was therefore calling upon them to come to this contract of joy in which the Lordship of Christ was fully acknowledged. Until that point, they would live in relative aimlessness. But from that moment, they could be locked in commitment. It has been fascinating to all of us, I am sure, to see how the great space program has been able to aim in secure trajectory these vehicles that carry men and machines to the various parts of our nearby universe. It is remarkable to us who are totally layman that such trajectories can be forecast and maintained. In one of the early, one of these space shots, a spaceship going toward Venus was guided by being locked-in upon the star, Canopus. As long as the sensing machinery sensed this light from Canopus, the spacecraft could keep its course. If it lost this one lone star in the vast universe, it lost its way going toward Venus. It was locked in commitment. It made its way unerringly because it was pinpointed in that relationship. It is likewise by the pinpointing of life in relation to a chosen Lord that we get away from an aimless wondering in this world of our lives, and come to an assured, and dependable, and hopeful direction. Dr. Paul Tournier, in his book, "The Adventure of living," tells of seeing a friend rise from prayer and then of hearing him say, as he rose, "I understand now. What I have to do is to write my name at the foot of a blank page, on which I will accept whatever God chooses to write. I cannot predict what he will put on this blank page, on this blank contract, as my life proceeds. But I give my signature today" That life, surrendered to the Lord in a contract of joy, is one whose problems are not immediately solved, but one which seeks, hopes, discovers, loves in new intensity and fresh joy. Dr. Tournier continues by saying, "The surrendered life is also an adventure. Because it is always only alert, listening to God, to his voice, and to his angels. It is an absorbing puzzle, an exciting search for the signs of God." In man's contract of joy, there is something beyond simply having a commitment that comes in the assurance of a companionship, an unfailing companionship that shall be our priceless possession throughout life. Paul, as he addressed his first letter to the congregation at Corinth, told his friends, "It is God himself who called you to share in the life of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And God keeps faith." In our contract of joy, we are joined by the Lord himself, who in a very wonderful way, needs us for his own satisfaction as we need him for our fulfillment. Today's man needs to know this most assuredly, for the characteristic man of our times walks in loneliness unless he has the assurance of a companionship outside the visible companionship of family and friends. Dr. Harlow Shapley, in his book, "Of Stars and Men," makes this point quite clearly concerning our place in the universe, saying that we are not alone, but live in the midst of millions, even billions of habitable planets, some of which you are no doubt like our own and have creatures liken to ourselves. In his book, he speaks also of the fourth adjustment, referring to man's first idea that he himself was the center of all the universe, and moving from that point through the various stages of discovery, until man finally has realized that not even the sun is the center of his universe, nor even the sun's galaxy, but this is a small corner of a vastness, incomprehensible. The fourth adjustment brings us

to that understanding. But I believe there's a fifth adjustment, a going beyond this, that says, for man, while I might not be the center of the universe, I am a part of focal concern on the part of God my creator. And of all the things, and all the persons, and all the creatures of the universe, I have as much of the concern and love of God as any. And I am in his living care. It is out of this kind of understanding that joy may arise because you and I may know we are really somebody in this universe, not left alone as items or bits of flotsam upon the waves of uncontrollable events, but important to the eyes of God, and given a destiny to fulfill. The surrounding companionship of the creator God and of the Holy Spirit, the living Christ, is always for his own good. The uprooted man cannot expect to flourish in a more than a rootless plant can expect to live. But when man is firmly implanted in the assurance of the reality of God and of his own importance in that economy of God, he may find his companionship, and out of that, discover rootage and develop his joy. It is marvelous, I think, to have a discovered Lord, more marvelous to have discovered the unfailing companionship of that Lord. But these two things are quite insufficient without a third, as you would understand. In the wisdom of God, the contract of joy in Christ does not leave us simply to be glad, forever reminding the world of how good it is to be in the kingdom. We are not left just to sing hallelujahs, and give testimonies of what God has done for us, and the joys that being so much better off than those who have not arrived at this state. For those who accept the Lord, the Lordship of Christ, accept also employment. It was not rhetoric that Christ used when he said that a man, to attain the ultimate goal of life, must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him. And the following of Jesus is not a sentimental journey of sweetness and light, through glades of beauty and across galleries of shimmering joy. The following of Jesus means to walk in the pathways where human necessity treads, going into the dark alleys of human despair, ferreting out the cause of the human defeat, living in the midst of the problems of mankind's soul, and exposing oneself in behalf of the least and neediest of all. Being employed in the work of Christ means to identify ourselves with humanity in its most critical requirements, where we sense our oneness we have with those who are deep in their sins, as much as we sense our oneness with Christ himself. And therefore, as Christ did, we apply ourselves to the cure of humanity's ills. The Christian person can never say in good conscience of any problem posed by humanity's condition, I don't want to get involved. No, he is automatically, by his choice of Lord, involved in seeking the remedies of human loss. That is to say, seeking to bring about this redemption and salvation of all mankind. He knows too that his worship is hollow unless it forms a prelude to his service. Bishop Roy Nichols said, "Worship, church organization, committees, are all just preparation. The important thing to do is to get to the work. If you never get to the job, the preparation is unimportant." The contract of joy in Christ does not leave us simply to be glad. For when we accept him, we accept employment. What then? What then? Here we come again to the words we have heard several times already. If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For you and I, in our places, as we enter into a contract of joy, enter into the companionship and the service of our Lord. I cannot think of a better way of trying to bring this to focus than to tell of a little known incident in the long ago years, that took place in the cold winter climate of New England. No, perhaps it wasn't there really, it took place partly in Boston, partly in South Carolina. It had rootage in England and in the continent of Europe. But it came about when, in the year 1693, a little colony in South Carolina, beginning to be established and realizing the need to grow and develop, sent word to friends in Boston saying, we have here no teacher, no preacher. We need one to come and give us guidance for our souls. Would you please send us someone here to give us leadership? When the word came to Boston, the people gathered together and gave solemn thought and prayer to the matter, and did not

decide to send a minister down to lead and assist these people in South Carolina. Instead, they decided to gather together a whole additional group of people, a number of families who would go down as Christian friends and servants to be a part of the community life of these people. And so, they banded together and again, with long preparation and much prayer, they made themselves ready to go to South Carolina. They went, a great church was formed. It served the people there many years until the whole colony was transplanted by their desires to Georgia. The church went with them and became the mother church to great citizens of the Southland, many of whose names you would know if I were to call them. But this is not the part of the story I want in your minds. There is just one sentence out of the record of that translation of these people from Massachusetts to South Carolina that I want to stick in your thoughts, one little line written as their own diary of what was going on. It says very simply, December 5th, 1695, the church for Carolina set sail from Boston. December 5th, 1695, the church for Carolina set sail from Boston. The flock set forth unafraid because they had long ago entered into a contract of joy with their Lord, and now were willing to follow his own guidance, and taken to themselves risks that were here involved. And so, in joy, they set sail to be the church for Carolina. Could I then ask more or less of you and me than to make this same kind of contract of joy, to discover the Lord, to know his companionship, to be in his employ, and to set sail to be the church for your place, for your Carolina? Let us pray. Heavenly Father, with those words of assurance in our minds yet, if we live, we live for the Lord, if we die, we die for Lord. Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord. May we enter into or renew our deep contract of joy with thee, through Christ our Lord, to thy great glory, to our own good, to the service of a people beloved, in Christ's name we pray, Amen. (uplifting music) (choir sings indistinctly) (choir sings indistinctly) ♪ Amen ♪ (gentle music) (uplifting music) (choir sings indistinctly) (choir sings indistinctly) (choir sings indistinctly) (choir sings indistinctly) (choir sings indistinctly) (choir sings indistinctly) (choir sings indistinctly) (uplifting music) (choir sings indistinctly) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ (choir sings indistinctly) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Almighty God, we come here now to dedicate ourselves and our money to the one who was willing to endure even the cross with joy, praying that we may accept whatever sacrifices are necessary in our lives to accomplish great things for thee, in Jesus' name. Now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. (gentle music) ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (bright music) (microphone squealing) (footsteps thudding) (people chattering) (people chattering)