

(solemn music)

- Grace and peace to you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We welcome you to this service of worship at Duke University Chapel on this 20th Sunday after Pentecost. We trust that you will receive a blessing during this time. We also extend greetings to those of you in our radio and television audiences. Our preacher for this morning is the Reverend Doctor John W. Vannorsdahl, President of Lutheran Theological Seminary. Dr. Vannorsdahl preaches and lectures regularly throughout the country. He's been a preacher for the Lutheran Series for the Protestant Hour since 1976. He's also published widely, and his most recent book is a collection of sermons entitled *Dimly Burning Wicks*. Prior to his current position, Dr. Vannorsdahl served as university chaplain at Yale University for 10 years. We welcome Dr. Vannorsdahl to our pulpit today. We are indebted to the Charlotte Children Choir of Queens College for their participation in our service this morning. They are directed by Dr. Elizabeth Campbell. Please note the other announcements as they are printed in your bulletins. And now let us continue our worship. (choir singing) (solemn music) (congregation singing) Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity, and that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

- Let us pray. Open our hearts and minds, oh 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 today is taken from the book of Ruth. "In the days when the judges ruled "there was a famine in the land, "and a certain man of Bethlehem and Judah went to sojourn "in the country of Moab, "he and his wife and his two sons. "The name of the man was Elimelech "and the name of his wife Naomi, "and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. "They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. "They went into the country of Moab and remained there. "But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, "and she was left with her two sons. "These took Moabite wives. "The name of the one was Orpah "and the name of the other Ruth. "They lived there about 10 years, "and both Mahlon and Chilion died, "so that the woman was bereft of her two sons "and her husband. "Then she started with her daughters-in-law "to return from the country of Moab, "for she had heard in the country of Moab "that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. "So she set out from the place where she was "with her two daughters-in-law, "and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. "But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "'Go, return each of you to her mother's house. "'May the Lord deal kindly with you, "'as you have dealt with the dead and with me. "'The Lord grant that you may find a home, "'each of you in the house of her husband!' "And then she kissed them, "and they lifted up their voices and wept. "And they said to her, 'No, "'we will return with you to your people.' "But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters; "'why will you go with me? "'Have I yet sons in my womb "'that they may become your husbands? "'Turn back, my daughters; "'go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. "'If I should say I have hope, "'even if I should have a husband this night "'and should bear sons, "'would you therefore wait till they are grown? "'Would you therefore refrain from marrying? "'No, my daughters, "'for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake "'that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.' "Then they

lifted up their voices and wept again. "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. "And she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back "'to her people and to her gods; "'return after your sister-in-law.' "But Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave you, "'or to return from following after you, "'for where you go, I will go; "'and where you lodge, I will lodge. "'Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. "'Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. "'May the Lord do so to me, and more also, "'if even death parts me from you.' "And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, "she said no more. "So the two of them went on "until they came to Bethlehem." This ends the reading of the first lesson.

- Please stand as we read this altar responsively. Praise the Lord. I will praise the Lord as long as I live. Put not your trust in princes. When his breath departs, he returns to his earth. Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob who made heaven and earth, who keeps faith forever. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord watches over the sojourners. He upholds the widow and the fatherless. The Lord will reign forever. (solemn music) (choir singing)

- The second lesson is taken from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, "To the church of the Thessalonians "in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ: "Grace to you and peace. "We give thanks to God always for you all, "constantly mentioning you in our prayers, "remembering before our God and Father "your work of faith and labor of love "and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. "For we know, family beloved by God, "that he has chosen you, "for our gospel came to you not only in word, "but also in power and in the Holy Spirit "and with full conviction. "You know what kind of men we proved to be among you "for your sake. "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, "for you received the word in much affliction, "with the joy of the Holy Spirit, "so that you became an example "to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. "For not only has the word of the Lord "sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, "but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, "so that we need not say anything. "For they themselves report "concerning us what a welcome we had among you, "and how you turned to God from idols "to serve a living and a true God, "and to wait for his Son from heaven, "whom he raised from the dead, "Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." This ends the reading of the second lesson. (choir singing)
The gospel lesson is taken from Matthew. "Then the Pharisees went and took counsel "how to entangle him in his talk. "And they sent their disciples to him, "along with the Herodians, "saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are true "'and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for none, "'for you do not regard the position of any. "'Tell us then what you think. "'Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' "But Jesus, aware of their malice, "said, 'Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? "'Show me the money for the tax.' "And they brought him a coin. "And Jesus said to them, "'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' "They said, 'Caesar's.' "Then he said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar "'the things that are Caesar's, "'and to God the things that are God's.' "When they heard it, they marveled. "And they left him and went away." This ends the reading of the gospel lesson.

- May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptably in thy sight, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. I thank you for the privilege of being able to worship with you again in the Duke Chapel. What you may not understand is that your ministry here has had its impact on the larger church as well, largely through the gifts of your ministers. So I bring you not only greetings, but thanks, from those of us who have profited from what you are and do. A long time ago, when I first joined the sub junior

varsity debate team in high school, I quickly discovered that I didn't know a single thing about debating and that the coach had no time to teach me. He suggested that I visit a professor at a nearby college who was well known as a public speaker and debater. So I made an appointment. "Well, young man, "what can I do for you?" "I like to learn to be a good debater." "Well," he said leaning back, "first you collect all the information you can on the topic, "and then you create a dilemma for the opposition." Now, dilemma was not a word we used very often in my home, so he explained it. "You just ask them a question of such a nature "that if they answer it one way, they lose, "and if they answer it the other way, they lose." The professor seemed satisfied that he'd said all that I needed to know, so I thanked him and walked home saying to myself, "What was that all about?" But now 100 years later, I at least recognized a dilemma when I see it. Seminary presidents are well acquainted with lose-lose. The pharisees sent some of their disciples to see Jesus. First, they baited the trap. "Teacher, we know that you're a person of integrity. "You tell the truth, you say it as it is. "You're afraid of no one." So we have a question. Should we pay taxes to Caesar, or not? That's a dilemma. If Jesus said, "Of course you should pay taxes." then he would be considered a collaborator by his own people. And if he said, "No, you should not pay taxes to Caesar." he would lose again. This time, the Romans would take him away. The debaters of that age had sprung their trap. It was a lose-lose situation. But Jesus was quick-witted. He patted his robe and he discovered that he had no Roman coins with him. "Let me see one of yours," he said. And it turned out that the trappers did in fact carry Roman coins, so they gave him one. "Whose face and inscription are these?" "Caesar's," they said. "Well, "you have Caesar's coins, "pay Caesar's tax, "but "render to God the things which are God's." So the hunters went home empty handed. And while that ended the debate for that day, it certainly did not end the issue of when or whether Christians should hail Caesar and pay Caesar's tax. In some years later, after the congregations of Christian had begun to form, the Saint Paul wrote to the Congregation at Rome. "Let every person," he said, "be subject to the governing authorities. "Whoever resist the authorities "resists what God has appointed. "Those who resist will incur judgment." "Pay all of them their due, "taxes to whom taxes are due, "revenues to whom revenues are due, "respect to whom respect is due, "honor to whom honor is due." But there is another occasion recorded in the book of Acts in which the apostles were teaching in Jerusalem. Converts were made in large numbers. People were crowding around the apostles to hear the gospel, and the priests were concerned and they had them arrested, theses apostles, and the apostles were brought before the counsel and the high priest said in effect, "We told you to stop it. "We are the authorities, "but you continue to fill all Jerusalem with your teachings, "you violated our authority." And Peter responded, "We must obey God, "rather than human beings." So, the issue is not easily resolved by resort to biblical texts. Paul says that we are to obey civil authorities to pay taxes, and he finds government a gift of God. Peter, in a different circumstance, says that he and the other apostles must obey God, rather than the authorities. And between the two, between Peter's adherence to God first and Paul's affirmation of civil authority lies the enigmatic answer of Jesus to the disciples of the pharisees, "Render unto Caesar those things which are Caesar's, "and unto God that which is due to God." Let me argue first with Saint Paul for a hearty hail to Caesar. Support obedience to human authority. T.S. Eliot once wrote that it's hard for those who lived next to the police station to believe in the possibility of the triumph of violence. And since most white middle-class Americans live next to a police station, it's easy for us to ignore the possibility of chaos. Easy for us to take the law for granted, to skirt the law when it suits us, to be critical of the law to deprecate authority. We can be careless of the law and nose thumbers because we have seldom been in danger from chaos. When we get up our courage and march in front of the White House, we are protected, we find, by a

ring of police. It's a heady genteel protest without fear of being clubbed. When we go to a massive demonstration where all hell could break loose, there are the sturdy marshals, hand-picked, well-trained, our people with yellow arm bands, green arm bands, making sure that everything is well-ordered, and we'll have first aid if we think from the crush or direction if we need a restroom, but sometimes violence comes close. I was in grade school when I first saw it at a basketball game. Two Cleveland high school teams playing one another, and one from a predominantly black school and another from a predominantly white school. It was a close game and a fight broke out in the stands, and it began to spread. My father who was the coach of one of the teams pushed me under the scorekeeper's table, picked up the blank pistol used by the time keeper and fired it in the gymnasium. In the momentary silence which followed, he shouted, "Let's play basketball." And the police moved in and the game continued, and I have never seen my father so shaken. Chaos had come close. Years later, in the early '70s, I was the chaplain at a college and had invited William Kunstler to speak. 2,000 students filled the auditorium. As at most schools, it was a volatile time. When the old civilities no longer obtained, Kunstler was late. The noise level increased. The students began to stamp their feet in rhythm and the whole building began to tremble. Some of them began to stand on their seats and took up a rhythmic chant. The president of the college and I standing at the back knew that something had to happen quickly. Fortunately, at that moment, Kunstler arrived, but the president said to me later, "The distance between our being a community of scholars "and a mob "is a very short distance." And that day we had come very close to being a mob. It's hard for those of us who are gathered in the majesty of this chapel to appreciate the fact that this morning there are 500,000 Americans in jail cells. It is hard for young men and women graduating from seminary devout and educated and kneeling before the altar to commit themselves to a sacred ministry to comprehend how many of their colleagues, and perhaps they themselves in time to come will seduce their counselee and commit adultery with their parishioners. Hail Caesar. Be you tyrant, republic, or something in between, it is your job to make me safe from my neighbors, to keep the roads open for travel and commerce, to adjudicated conflicts, to curb my rapacious ways, my depredations upon the common good by threat of punishment or by reward to provide some minimal order in this land. Though I chafe, resent, and attack him, I will give Caesar his due and give thanks to God when Caesar insists upon my connectedness and thereby makes freedom possible in spite of all the sin and evil which is our collective lot. Render unto Caesar what is due. Break the law at the peril of all of us. On the other hand, now with Peter in Jerusalem. On the other hand, render unto God the things which are Gods. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength. Said Peter to the high priest, "We must obey God, rather than human authority." And so, although it was the law that blacks be segregated and excluded, some Christians, black and white, and some Jews and some humanitarians, came to believe that in God's sight, this was both unjust by civil standards and a sin before God. And so they broke the civil law and defied the authorities. And so, likewise, although the law required all young men to register for the draft, some Christians and Jews came to believe that in God's site military service required them to kill, rob them of their freedom to say no to killing, and so they broke the law and defied the civil authorities. But the prime example in all of history, human and divine, is Jesus Christ who was warned time and again that he was disrupting the civil order with his preaching, attacking the religious and civil foundations upon which the current order was based, warned, and yet could not change his course. His ultimately loyalty was to God. This conflict between what civil and religious authorities thought necessary for the good of society and what Jesus found necessary in obedience to God, were the horizontal and the vertical of the cross, the unsentimental consequence of two realities for which there was no other resolution, render unto God the

things which are God's. Now I realize that that there is no comfort of the gospel in today's text. I come to worship much as most of you with my personal disasters, my sins, my need to be embraced and warmed and raised again in hope. But today, this personal address of the gospel, this warming, this lifting from our knees has to be found from in other texts, in the hymns, the prayers, and sermons remembered because it is not in this passage from Saint Matthew, but it would have been wrong I think in the days of the bicentennial of the constitution and the Caesar text to ignore the issues which they present, of how we render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. I've been thinking about this chapel and its centrality at Duke. Is it central because here students and faculty have met their personal need or longing for Christ's compassion? Do you come because your hearts are warmed? Or is it because here most people acknowledge the supremacy of God in all things and the chapel is set central and honored by our presence because we want to say God is central in all things? I frankly see a far more profound possibility. I see a chapel where men and women come who are now and will be Caesar's people, must be Caesar's people, rendering unto Caesar what is due. I see you come also as God's people, called by a vision of a future which has come in Christ, or for Jews still coming, and to whom you owe an ultimate loyalty. And at this place, with these two necessary loyalties pressing on your hearts, you, too, will be crucified with Christ. The crossbar is the realities of the world where laws condemn, and lawyers argue, and jails are built. That is your world and mine. Upright is the vision of a larger truth which is not yet but is sure to come. You come here either naive about yourselves, nor hopeless with the world's cruel reality. You come into this cruciform structure, dare to come, not because you have disavowed Caesar, or somehow been able to put the law behind you, or because you've even laid hold of God, but precisely because here neither the necessity of Caesar nor the promise of God is ignored, because here the witness is made that the one nailed to the ends of these two realities was raised from the dead and foreshows the future. This was the week that the French playwright, Anouilh, died. The author of a modern version of the ancient Greek classic, Antigone. And rendering unto Caesar and unto God are the dramatic theme of Anouilh's Antigone. As you all remember, there's been a rebellion in Thebes where Creon is king. And his nephew, one of the rebels, lies dead outside the city gates. Antigone insists that her brother have a proper burial. Creon, the king, refuses for reason of state. "Don't think," says Creon, "that I am not as offended as you are. "By the thought of that meat rotting in the sun, "in the evening when the breeze comes in off the sea, "you can smell it in the palace, and it nauseates me. "But I refuse even to shut my window. "I know it's stupid, monstrously stupid, "but the people of Thebes have got to have their noses "rubbed in it a little longer. "if this feather-headed rabble I govern "are understand what's what, "that stench has got to fill the town for a month." "You're a loathsome man." Responded Creon, "I agree." Hail Caesar and praise God from whom flows some new and larger vision. Amen. (solemn music)

- The Lord be with you. Let us pray. Most gracious God who art above us, and in us, and through us, we bow in prayer before thee, seeking a new awareness they reality and of they life-giving presence. In so doing, we offer these prayers for others that in our remembering of their needs we may be reminded of our own neediness as we stand in utter dependency upon thee. Let us pray for those who suffer in our world, for the masses of starving people, that whatever language they may speak, their cried of anguish will be heard. For homeless people everywhere, for those who dwell on the streets of our nation's cities, for thousands of refugees who roam the earth searching for a home, for runaway children, that each may find a place of rest and understanding. Let us pray for those who are bereaved over the loss of a loved one, over news of a

debilitating illness, over memories of happier days gone by, that thy healing presence may restore them to fullness of life. Let us pray for those caught in the struggles of discernment. For all those contemplating life-changing decisions, grant them wisdom. For those who seek to know thee, yet struggle to believe, grant them the courage necessary to take the leap of faith. For leaders of all the nations, that they may understand and respond to the needs of all the world's people and lead us in the pathway of peace. Let us pray for all who feel unloved or unwanted. For those who seek to enter themselves or others, for those who indulge in material excesses, attempting to fill an interior void, for those who lived within institutions surrounded by people yet lonely beyond words, heal these thy children, oh God, that they may appreciate the unique worth which thou has bestowed upon them. These and the many unspoken concerns of this congregation, we lift unto thee redeeming God, trusting in thy goodness, confident in thy power to heal, grateful that thou art love for all eternity. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen. And now in the spirit of Thanksgiving, let us offer our gifts and ourselves unto God. (solemn music) (choir singing) Almighty God, we thine unworthy servants do give the most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving kindness to us and to all men and women. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all, for thine inestimable love and redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ for the means of grace and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies that our hearts may be eternally thankful and that we may show forth thy praise not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray with confidence. 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. (solemn music) (congregation singing) Now go forth in peace and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the blessing of God, creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen. (choir singing) (pipe organ music)