

(reverberating organ music) (reverent organ music) (reverberating choral music) (organ music interlude)  
(soaring choral music)

- We are gathered to worship God with minds and hearts, set on many things. Joy and sadness, faith and doubt, guilt and forgiveness, private concerns and social problems, severe temptations and gloriously constructive opportunities. God bids you a cordial welcome on this day, and promises to meet you helpfully at the point of your most pressing needs. Let us worship God. Praying together as a community of faith our prayer of confession, keeping in mind that the god to whom we pray is a god of mercy, a god of deep compassion, a god of grace. Praying together: oh God, in history as in the heavens, desiring to repent, we confess now our sin. You create us to be free, but we abuse your gift. We are an obstinate people, quick to claim your mercy, yet willing to settle for cheap grace. We are fickle disciples, caring when it is easy, aloof when caring will be costly. Called to be children of light, we embrace the shadows. Pardon, oh lord, our transgressions. Remove from us the burden of our failures. By the promptings of your holy spirit, make us a new creation. Through him who comes to find and redeem what is lost, Jesus the Christ, amen. My sisters and my brothers, know, believe, experience within yourselves the good news, that in Jesus Christ, who is our lord and our redeemer, we are forgiven. Let us give thanks for God is good, and God's love is everlasting. Thanks be to God, whose love creates us. Thanks be to God, whose mercy redeems us. Thanks be to God, whose grace leads us into the future. 32 to 26. Frankly, those numbers make it much easier to welcome you to homecoming weekend. Our thanks to Ben Bennet and gang, for that score. We do welcome you who are returning to the campus for the first time in some time. We're glad to have you back. We sense that there are good things taking place. That old friendships are being renewed. That new friendships are being born. And for these things, we are grateful. And on this 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, this homecoming weekend, we welcome you to Duke Chapel, and this place of worship. I would draw your attention especially to the students in the congregation this morning, to the announcement regarding the designation of June 15th as the Sunday on which the student preacher will preach here in Duke Chapel. You will note that you will be able to get application forms with other information from the chapel office, in the basement of the chapel. And that the deadline for submitting that application in your name is October the 31st. In other words, tomorrow. So we encourage you who are interested in preaching on student Sunday to get the information and the application form sometime tomorrow. It is with considerable pleasure that I introduce and welcome to our pulpit this morning our guest preacher, Bishop W. Kenneth Goodson. Bishop Goodson, as you will note in the bulletin, has a distinguished career as an administrator, as one who has cared for his people, and as bishop in residence, we are coming to know him as most especially a pastor, a man who is available to those of us at this school in times of crisis and also in times of considerable celebration. We are, indeed, grateful to welcome Bishop Goodson to the pulpit this morning. We look forward to his preaching of the word.

- Let us pray. Oh God, you who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of your glory, and the face of Jesus Christ, amen. The Old Testament lesson is

from Jeremiah. Chapter 18, verses one through six. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words. So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the Lord came to me: O, house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done, says the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. Here ends the reading from the Old Testament. The New Testament lesson is from Revelation, chapter 21, verses one through five- A. Then I saw a new heaven and a new Earth, for the first heaven and the first Earth had passed away. And the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. And God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who sat upon the throne said: behold, I make all things new. Here ends the reading from the New Testament. (somber organ music) (reverent choral music) Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the gospel lesson. Gospel lesson is from Luke, chapter 19, verses one through 10. He entered Jericho and was passing through, and there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was of small stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him: Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today. So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured: he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. And Jesus said to him: today, salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Here ends the reading from the gospel lesson. Amen. (echoing organ music) (soaring choral music)

- The words that came from Jeremiah from the Lord said: arise and go down to the potter's house. And there I will let you hear my words. So, I went down to the potter's house and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and they reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me and said: O, house of Israel, can I not do for you what this potter has done with the clay? Now, I begin by saying to you what a frightening joy it is to always preach in the Duke Chapel. And what a joy homecoming weekend has been, as we were making our way to the car yesterday afternoon, after the game, we found the goalposts on the steps of the chapel. (laughing) And being one who is interested in theology, I turned and said to my wife: what a burnt offering to bring to the Lord. (laughing) What a joyous weekend it has been for all of us who live here, and what a great thrill it is to have all of you back. Many of you to whom your religious heritage will date back to the chapel, as does mine, will know what an unusual experience it is to be here, and to be a part of this worshiping community. There is a little town about 100 miles away from here. Not very much of a little town, just a little town. It is a little community called Jugtown. It's not very big, no one's ever really taken the population, but it happens to be surrounded by an unusual deposit of clay. And across a good many years, people who live in that part of America have made their living by being potters. And some of them in

family relationships that date back hundreds of years. I go every now and again to Jugtown, so that I can stand at the potter's wheel, and watch him as he does his thing. Some while ago in the Washington Art Gallery, as I was making my way through, I came upon a young man, seated at a bench. In front of him were two potter's wheels. A longer one below, and a smaller one at the top. Two of them connected with a shaft. It was the ancient tool of his handicraft. He was spinning the wheel and shaping the clay, as hundreds of generations of potters had done before him. And when I stood there, I realized that I was seeing almost precisely what the prophet Jeremiah saw, as he strolled down to the potter's house. I stood there for a little while as I'd done in Jugtown, many times across my life, and speculated on what the prophet was thinking. He was thinking about his land, and for him, he was thinking about Israel. For me, I'm thinking about America. And the destiny of Israel was now in question, and the potter brought it all to Jeremiah's mind. Even as clay in the hands of the potter, so is Israel clay in the hands of God. He asked the question that you and I ask about our own land and our own nation today: was she being shaped by a power over which she had no control? Or was she actually hopeless in the hands of an iron fate? But as he stood there and as he watched the potter doing his thing, he saw an unusual thing happen. Imperfections appeared in the clay. Whatever it was that marred the vessel, the vessel was now fit, perhaps, only to be thrown away, or to be called unusable material. It wasn't good clay any longer. It had marred itself by its own bias. It had marred itself by its own prejudice, it had marred itself by whatever imperfections there are in human life. And was that to be Israel's fate, Jeremiah said to himself. Was she a nation not fit to be anything else but a human failure? And then Jeremiah saw something else happen. He saw the potter take the broken clay and remove the imperfections and shape it again and place it back on the wheel. He saw the potter give the shaft a kick, and with his delicate fingers, he watched the potter as he shaped the clay again, and a form of rare beauty gradually emerged from what had been an unusable bit of material. There, said Jeremiah, is the message for Israel. There I say is the message for America. She has the opportunity of God to make her over again. Jeremiah was laying hold upon a deep truth. We shall pursue it in our own modern way, and pursue it under the deep conviction that life can be made over. The real enemies of life, in the final analysis are two old and familiar ones. One is fatalism, and the other is pessimism. And the creative life in God in the 20th century must find itself facing both of them. Fatalism is always based upon a half-truth. The half-truth being that it makes no difference what you do, that time is not in your hands. There is nothing you can do about your own destiny, about your own tomorrow, about your own future. God's in his heaven, but nothing's right with the world, and there isn't anything very much that you can do about it. Fatalism is a kind of an idea that reminds us that there are forces over which we have no control, that determine our own destiny. It is a half-truth. We did not choose to be born. But what we do with our life, whether we see it in terms of possibilities or whether we make choices up or down the level, all of that makes a difference. And no one should ever remind me of the half-truth, that it does not matter who I am or what I am. This is our chances, we'll go down to the potter's house to give the lie to fatalism; life can be made over. I was reading not very long ago a book by a man named Marleson, entitled: Admiral of the Ocean Sea. He's talking about the life of Christopher Columbus. And at the close of his book, he quotes out of the Nuremberg Chronicle, dated July the 12th, 1493. And this has been, as I understand it, 490 years ago. May I read you the leading editorial out of the Nuremberg Chronicle, 490 years ago? Lest anybody feel really an unjustified optimism, the Nuremberg Chronicle places the year 1493 in the sixth age of the world. At that time, there begins a prophecy of the seventh age. The prophecy is this: only the wicked will prosper. Good men will fall into contempt. There will be no faith, no law, no justice, no peace, no humanity, no humility, no shame. No truth.

And no living man will live the good life. 490 years ago, fatalism was at its heights. But even at that moment when the Nuremberg Chronicle was telling what the seventh age that you and I report of was going to be, Christopher Columbus was sailing the high seas, and the world was being made over again by the potter. And then came an enlightened of Britain, and then came America, and then came the Wesleys, and then came Louis Pasteur and then came Benjamin Franklin, and then came Thomas Jefferson, and then came George Washington, and then came all the magnificent discoveries of science and human values. And the Nuremberg Chronicle, it was wrong. Life was made over again by the potter. The other enemy of life is pessimism. It is that kind of an attitude and that kind of a spirit that almost dominates us. And to be perfectly frank about it, pessimism has some ground on which to stand. Let us concede that man has a great power to do evil, and he does it. But that doesn't mean that he's hopeless. I refuse and shall refuse as long as I live to believe that man is completely hopeless, that man is utterly hopeless. Pat O'Brien was one of my favorite actors. And I remember when he did Newt Rockne, and that other man who did George Gibb. Pat O'Brien died within the last fortnight, and at his funeral, they quoted out of an address that Pat O'Brien did when he received an honorary degree from Notre Dame. I refuse to be hopeless, said Pat O'Brien, for I have arrived at the conclusion that to be hopeless is the horror of life. Pessimism has written no hymns. There are no anthems by pessimism or fatalism. There are no cathedrals built in their honors, there are no homecomings. Nevermore than now do we need to assert the fact that we are the opportunities of God, to be made over. I got a copy the other day of a letter that a preacher friend of mine had gotten from a young man in his church who had been something of an unusual cynic. They'd spend many hours in counseling, but he remained a cynic. He just was going to be a cynic. And then he went away for a long trip and finally, he wrote his minister: I've had an unusual journey since I saw you last. And the stimulation for it has been in the meeting of the masses, as I have stubbornly called them. The amazing thing about it is that I have found them to be so good. I tell you now that Lincoln and Jefferson, and the man that you tried to tell me about who lived a couple of thousand years ago, are in the final analysis, right. There is only one hope for the world, he writes. And that lies in tearing off the fetters that thwart and bind the innate goodness of the average man. I've found sensitivity, he says, in a Brooklyn bartender, in a New Jersey truck driver, and a Broadway bookie and their goodness amazed me. There is a considerateness and a respect for the other fellow, in the average man, that I had never suspected until I came in contact with a large number of average men. And all of this has lent conviction to my faith that democracy remains the most adequate theory of government, and that the possibilities to realize are near its system, are limited only by the nature of mankind itself. The nature of mankind, I am finding to be basically good. Your friend, a former cynic. The potter is still at the wheel. I wrote in with pencil early this morning, when I was going over what I wanted to say to you, that I changed my mind about truck drivers. All they've ever done was block the road. And hog the path. Until in the early years of my ministry, I became the minister of a church that was predominantly occupied by truck drivers. Thus a cynical youth can be brought out of a life that can be made over out of stuff like that. So after reading the material, reading the letter from the cynic to the preacher, I wrote him a letter and I said: ask your young friend, where did the master obtain his material to work with? Not many high and mighty were called. But a crooked tax collector. A woman taken in sin. A group of unlettered fisherman who never would have been nominated for anybody's board of deacons. And yet Jesus gave them a new set of values, a new understanding of the meaning of life. A new relationship to life itself. He made life over for them. And sent them out to see if they could have any influence on human history. Talk about a man that do love Jesus. There were some. It is with such a faith that we must enter, it seems to me, the

uncertainties of our own times. We will forever have to repudiate the belief that the cards are stacked against us and that the dice are loaded, but rather with our hearts and our minds, we must face the most titanic struggle of all human history. And with sure faith that life can be made over again. We live in a strange world. It is a world that you describe in your own experience, day after day, and I describe in mine. It is no compliment to me that I never heard of Grenada. And though I have sailed the seas, that surround Lebanon, and I have found that of all the cities on this Earth that I have visited in the course of my life, Beirut is the loveliest. Scarcely a person will escape having his life situation unaffected, but with what attitude shall we face the future? Shall we do it with an attitude of pessimism, or shall we do it with an attitude of fatalism? These stifle and kill the soul. They will not do. I will bring my goalpost to the altar of the church. For it alone tells me about human values that are lasting, about decencies that are never out of style. About human conduct that isn't archaic. So the answer for you and the answer for me is in neither fatalism nor pessimism, though I have a kind of a contagion for both of them. But refuse to submit to it. The answer lies somewhere else for the embattled men and women of our day. We must go to the rich resources of the human spirit, and when we get there, we will find not fatalism, with its impersonal authority, nor pessimism with its fiendish grin, but we shall find a hand that reaches out to grasp your hand, and we shall hear a voice replying to your voice. And we shall look into the eyes of one who seems to know. And to understand. And he will tell us that out of the creative spirit comes the word of the Lord, and that word is that life can be made over. There is a little town not far away from here. Called Jugtown. And every now and again, when I grow weary of life, I ride down there. And stand by the potter's wheel. It reminds me of who I am. And whose I am. And I come home humming: have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way. Thou art the potter, and I am the clay. Mold me and make me, after thy will. For I am waiting, and yielded, and I am still. So have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way. Hold o'er my being, all of my being, absolute sway. Fill with thy spirit, til all shall see, Christ only, always, living in me. That's who I am. That's whose I am. Amen. (somber organ music) (echoing choral music)