

(Organ music playing)

Preacher: Good morning. Welcome to Duke Chapel for the service of worship. If you're visiting with us today, we're delighted to have you with us for this time of prayer and praise. Our guest organist is Dr. Thomas B. Clark. Our guest director of the choir today is Mr. Thomas James, member of our Chapel Choir. And our lecturer is Dr. Vivian Johnson, member of the congregation. Now, let us stand together for the greeting. Praise the Lord, praise God in his sanctuary, praise God in his mighty firmament. (congregation repeats) Praise God with the trumpets sound, praise God with lute and harp. (congregation repeats) Praise the Lord. (organ music playing) (choir and congregation singing) (singing continues)

Woman: Almighty God, from whom every good prayer comes, and who pours out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and supplication. Deliver us, when we draw near to you from coldness of heart, and wonderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship you in spirit and in truth through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dr. Johnson: Let us pray together the prayer for illumination.

- [Dr. Johnson And Congregation] Open our hearts and minds O, God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we may hear your message with joy this day, Amen. The first lesson is taken from the second book of Samuel. Chapter 6, verses 1-5 and verses 12B-19. "David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, 30,000. David, and all the people with him, set out and went from Baala, Judah, to bring up from there, the ark of God. Which is called by the name of the Lord of Hosts, who is enthroned on the Cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God, and Ahio went in front of the ark. David, and all the house of Israel, were dancing before the Lord with all their might. With songs, and lyres, and harps, and tambourines, and castanets, and cymbals. So David went, and brought up the ark of God, from the house of Obed-edum to the city of David with rejoicing. And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox, and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might, the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michael, daughter of Saul, looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord and she despised him in her heart. They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place inside the tent David had pitched for it, and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. When David had finished offering the burnt offerings, and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women. To each, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes." This is the word of the Lord. (congregation responds)

Man: Today's psalm is number 24, found on page 755 in the hymnal. Please stand and sing the Psalm and Gloria responsively. (music starts) ♪ ♪ The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ For God has founded it upon the seas ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ Those who have clean hands and pure hearts ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ They will receive blessings from the Lord ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ Such is the generation of those who seek the Lord ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up ♪ ♪ O, ancient doors, that the ruler of Glory ♪ ♪ may come in. ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ The Lord's strong and mighty, ♪ ♪ The Lord, mighty in battle ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ Who is this ruler of Glory? ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ O Glory be to you, Creator, and to ♪ ♪ Jesus Christ, our savior. ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ As it was, ere time began. ♪ ♪ (Congregation responds) ♪ ♪ Please be seated.

Dr. Johnson: The second reading is from the gospel of Mark, Chapter 6, verses 14-29. "King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptizer has been raised from the dead, and for this reason, these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'it is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.' For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison, on account of Herodias, his brother Phillip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias held a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous man, and he protected him. But an opportunity came, when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, and officers, and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests, and the King says to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptizer.' Immediately, she rushed back to the King, and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths, and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately, the King sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb." This is the word of the Lord. (congregation responds) (Choir singing) (Choir continues singing)

Preacher: Today's epistle is from the letter to the Ephesians. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Just as he chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world to be Holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ. According to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, that he freely bestowed on us, in the beloved. In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespass, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will. According to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Him, things in Heaven, things on Earth. In Christ, we have also obtained an inheritance. Having been destined according to the purpose of Him, who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will. So that we, who are the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of His glory. In him, you also, when you heard the

word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, you were marked and sealed in the promise of the Holy Spirit. This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people. To the praise of His glory." This is the word of the Lord. (congregation responds) One of the nice things about summer, is that the leisure provided by this time of the year, gives you a chance to read those books you've laid aside over the course of the year. And recently, I read a book called, "Dakota" by the writer Kathleen Norris. "Dakota", a spiritual autobiography. Norris tells about moving from the big city, out to the plains of North Dakota. She doesn't say much about her Christian faith in the book, but in one place in the book Norris recalls growing up in a Presbyterian church in her childhood. And she says, 'I don't remember a lot about church in my childhood. I remember going to a confirmation class, and I did well because I was good at memorization. I remember a kindly pastor. But most of all, what I remember from my childhood church, is singing in my dad's choir. I remember the singing. And looking back, I would say that maybe the purpose of church is praise. The purpose, is the praise.' Now I know, that that might be a problem for you. Because, you are here in the middle of July, in church. And if you go to church, in the middle of July, when most people are on vacation, that's probably a sign, that you are extremely serious about your Christian faith. Oh, there are some slackers show up here on Easter, Christmas, that's enough for them. But not for you. Even though you're on vacation, even though you're coming down 85, you're headed south, you're headed north, you're getting ready, everybody else is out at the lake, you are here in church because you are disciplined. Because you want to work on your faith. And of course, we Americans pride ourselves on our ability to work, and our ability to do. And it's only reasonable that we should do the Christian faith in the same way that we do everything else. We like thinking of ourselves as self-made men, and self-made women. One of Emerson's most famous essays was entitled, 'Self-Reliance' 'Self-Reliance', if you haven't read it since high school, I'll sum it up for you: 'Please mother, I'd rather do it myself' Browse around, at your neighborhood bookstore in the self-help section, it's one of the largest sections. Do-it-yourself, how to fix it yourself, how to do it yourself, self-therapy. We are big on doing things for ourselves. And yet, the scripture which I have just read you, this glorious hymn, which opens the letter to the Ephesians. In this passage of scripture Paul speaks about something that we have not done for ourselves. Something that we have not achieved through hard work, or burning the midnight oil, or sly maneuvering, or earnest endeavor. He's talking about our salvation. He's talking about our relationship to God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ." Paul opens his letter. "God has blessed us." How has God blessed us? "God chose us in Christ before the very foundation of the world. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ. He freely bestowed upon us, in Him, we have redemption, in Him, we have forgiveness. And he has made known to us the mystery of his will." Note, who has done all of this. Note, where the action is in these sentences. It's with God, not with us. We gather as Christians on Sunday to praise God. And we go to the office on Monday through Saturday not in order to get somewhere with God but rather because we believe that in Christ we've already arrived with God. We sing songs to God here on Sunday morning, we bless God here on Sunday with our songs. So that Monday and the rest of the week in the office we might bless God with our deeds. God has blessed us, chosen us, redeemed us, forgiven us. And because of all this, Paul says, "We might live to His praise." When someone gives you a gift, what do you say? You say, "Thanks." And you might think of all Christian ethics, and all Christian believing and doing, as our Christian way of saying, "Thanks," as our song of thanksgiving to God. And you may be the only song to God that anybody may ever hear. So you want to make it a good song. A song worth singing, a song with so catchy a tune, that others might pick it up and get the beat as well. But I confess, that as a preacher, when I looked at this morning's scripture

from Ephesians, the preacher in me did not know exactly what to do with it. By that, I mean that you and I, good, American, achieving, self-help people that we are, you and I have been conditioned to think that sermons are mostly addressed to us. They are about what WE are supposed to do. The tales on how WE are to think, or WE are to feel, or WE are to act. But, we have noted there's very little of us in this passage from Ephesians. This is mostly about God. Paul is singing about God has done for us. How God has chosen forgive, and redeem, and adopted us. And I am saying that that's a problem for us modern, 'mother, I'd rather do it myself please' people. Because, many of us have come here this morning anxiously awaiting some word about what WE are to do. And we don't want to waste time singing songs about what God has done. There's a lot of atheism in the modern church. That is, there are too many sermons that spend too much time on us. On our activity about what we are to do, or to think, or to be. How many times have I heard people say, "I like a sermon that tells me what I am supposed to do, that tells me where I have gone wrong, and where I can live a better life." Or we say, church. Church is where we go on Sunday morning and we learn how we can get right with God. Or somebody else says, "Church is a place where you know what you need to do to get saved." And of course, there is truth in that. But sometimes, how to live a better life, just becomes another self-help, human technique of secular therapy for human betterment. Some kind of political program to save the world. Sometimes getting saved can be a matter of I have done, or I have believed, or what I have chosen. And so the Church's message comes just one more petty list of suggestions for better living, helpful hints for homemakers, just one more means of setting ourselves up, getting us somewhere. But I'll have you know, that Paul mentions none of this. The message he has is grand, it's large, it's cosmic. He begins not with us, not with our anxious navel-gazing, not with our anxious, moral introspection and scanning of our egos, and our needs, and our striving, our moral temperature-taking. He begins with God, the creator of Heaven and Earth, who an amazing act of divine graciousness has chosen, adopted, forgiven, redeemed us. And maybe he's saying that's where we ought to begin too. With remembrance of what God has done. With recognition of how blessed we are in Christ. Before we launch into any exploration about what we are to do for God. As John says, 'We love because God first loved us.' We bless God here on Sunday morning, because God has blessed us. Everything that we do as Christians flows from that. Any goodness we might achieve in this life is our humble way of just saying, "Thanks." Oh, but alas, so many times, church on Sunday mornings becomes a time where we come with our little moral notepads to get our homework for the week. Do this, don't do that. But this wonderfully exuberant shout of praise here in Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us, church really is as Kathleen Norris says, "the point is the praise." In praise, we get right down to the heart of what religious faith is. Our faith is not some anxious means for us to get somewhere with God. Rather praise reminds us that, the church is recognition of where God has gotten with us. Everything flows with that. Church, is our time to sign, to signal, to witness to the advent of the kingdom a counter-cultural place where the prisoners are freed, and the poor and the wretched of the Earth are royalty, and all things are made new. And when we gather to praise God on Sunday morning, what our hope is that we'll get good enough at praising God on Sunday that we'll know how to praise God on Monday. The world too easily captures us. We've become blinded, we've become paralyzed by the givens, prisoners of the status quo. Rather than adventurers, pushing, always probing out into that great unknown space God is creating by his love. How tragic, that the business of too many modern churches is just that, business. The round of programs, and ceramics classes, and basketball games, and choir practices, and finance committee meetings keep us all breathless and fatigued as we bustle about, working and becoming better and better every day, in every way. Keep people going to meetings rather than looking for the kingdom of

God. Rather than being a sign, pointing to God's kingdom, we've become a roadblock constructed by a church which has forgotten how to throw a party. Alas, much of our worship is distinguished by its dogged persistence rather than its beauty. And there we sit morosely in our bolted down pews like people sitting next to one another on a bus. Few people therefore cut loose. Burst into song. The philosopher Nietzsche spoke for many when he said, "You are going to have to look a lot more redeemed before I could believe in your redeemer." Oh but whenever the church does cut loose, in those moments when you found yourself, caught up, lost in wonder, love and praise, as the hymn puts it. This is our way of being in love, it's our way of witnessing to the world that there's a power let loose among us. To anyone who will listen, we proclaim, "Christ loved the church." Ephesians 5:23 And that's why we shout Hosanna, and that's why we get all worked up. His love explains, if reasons be needed, why are we here, why we sing. Some of you have heard me tell the story of visiting a friend of mine, at a brand new church his congregation had built in the inner city of a southern town, and he was showing me proudly around his multi-million dollar sanctuary, and it was beautiful. The stained glass windows, the great organ, the carpet, the beauty of this great sanctuary. And he was very proud of what his congregation had accomplished in this great building for God. And when we got through, I said to my friend, "You know, George, this is beautiful. And it's a wonderful church, building. But aren't you a little, don't you feel a little guilty building such a fine church in such a terribly poor neighborhood? Don't you feel kind of odd about building such a grand place of worship where there is so much poverty so close by?" And with that my friend George kind of stepped back and shook his head and laughed and said, "You white folks just can't stand for anybody to have a good time, can you?" Let me tell you one thing, if this neighborhood looks bad, if lives are being ruined in this neighborhood through poverty, this church exists to tell the world that's not the way God intended it to be. God didn't plan for ugliness for human lives, God planned for beauty. This church is here to sign, to signal, to witness to God's intention for humanity. And you know, that your faith is at its' best at those moments when you just sort of cut loose and something gets ahold of you and you soar forth with wings. Some utilitarian, pragmatic self-help person wandering around meets you on your way out of such an adventure and says, 'Now what good does that do? What are you gonna do with that at the hardware store on Monday morning? How does that put bread on anybody's plate?' No, no, no, that's all quite beside the point now. The point is you've seen a vision. Something has grasped you, greater than yourself. For one glorious moment, you climbed out of yourself and your ego needs, and your selfish strivings, and you have soared. And you know it's right, right there. Is what it's all about. I remember one Easter, not too long ago, when one of you emerged from an Easter service in which we had rented timpani, and we brought in trumpets, and we had violins, and cellos, and 150 voice choir, and we had banners, and walked out and you said, 'If I die right now, it's okay.' It's that praise, that is the point. In a famous prayer, St. Augustine noted that despite all of our sin and human weaknesses, it does seem like God has implanted deep within each of our souls a need to praise. Will you pray with me this prayer of St. Augustine? Great art thou O, Lord and greatly to be praised. Great is thy power, infinite is thy wisdom. Thou hast made in us a desire to praise thee. For we are part of thy creation. Though we bear mortality about us and carry evidence of our sin, still we desire to praise thee. We are only a small part of thy creation, and yet we desire to praise. Thou has prompted us, that we should delight to praise thee. For thou hast made us for thyself, and restless are our hearts until they rest in thee. Amen. (organ music playing) (choir singing)

Woman: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray, saying Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. You may be seated. O, eternal God, you have created us for yourself and for one another in a world of your own making. You are Lord above all Lords, and God above all Gods. Our Lord, and our God. As we bow before you, refresh our memories. Let us not forget where we are, whose we are, or the purpose you have ordained for our gifts. Remind us that the land in which we dwell, wherever it be, is your land. That the people among whom we dwell, whoever they be, are your people. And that the gifts, with which we are endowed, whatever they be, are bestowed to make us one as we sing your praises, and in our service to one another. Almighty God, you have called us ever to be mindful of the needs of our sisters and brothers around the world. Thus, we offer these prayers in faithful response to your word. O, God of compassion, you watch the ways of all of us, and accompany us through our darkest days. Surround those who have been shaken by tragedy of any sort, with a sense of your present love and hold them in faith. Though they may be drowning in a sea of grief, may they find you, and be comforted. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. O, Lord Jesus Christ, help us always to remember that it is you whom we behold in the weakened bodies and haunting faces of the hungry of the world. Grant that we may not turn away, but rather that we may receive your blessing as we minister to the least of our sisters and brothers. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. O, God of peace, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual patience and respect for the good of the whole world. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. O, God of plenty, in the midst of our abundance, we recall our debt to those who garner our food for us, for migrant workers who gather the crops in the blazing sun, for those who tend livestock through all types of weather, for farmers who plow, sow, and cultivate and then wait in hopeful anticipation. Teach us that we live because of your abundant mercy, and the labor of others. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. All knowing God, show us the poor both those who have been pushed aside in the wake of competition, and those who are victims of the system they helped to build. Show us that there is also a poverty of heart. When saving is more important than sharing. Help us to find security in sharing all our resources, and to discover the joy of giving. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. O, God of creation, in the course of our hectic lives, give us times of refreshment and peace. Grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies, and renew our minds, that our spirits may be open to the goodness of your creation. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. O, merciful God, we pray for all those who travel that they may be preserved in safety to their journey's end. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. O, sustaining God, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children. Grant us strength and wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just, and true, and good. Following the example of our savior, Jesus Christ. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Everlasting God, we pray for the sick and the afflicted, that they may be comforted and restored to fullness of life. When they are afraid, give them courage. When they are weary, strength. When they are in despair, hope. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. O, Lord, our redeemer, accept the fervent prayers of your people. In the greatness of your mercy, look with compassion upon us, and all who turn to you for help. For You are gracious, O lover of souls. And to you we give glory, now and forever. Amen. As we prepare to present our offerings of our life and our labor to the Lord, remember the words of Jesus, "Let your light so shine before people, that they may see your good works, and give glory to God in Heaven." (organ music playing) (choir singing)

- O, God, giver of all good, who continually pours your benefits upon us, age after age, your people wait upon you, and find that of your faithfulness, there is no end, and that your care is un failing for us. We praise you that the mystery of our life is a mystery of infinite goodness. We praise you for the order and constancy of nature. For the beauty and bounty of the Earth, for day and night, seed time and harvest. For the varied gifts of loveliness and use which every season brings. We give you thanks for all the surprising graces which come to us. For those that sustain our lives, and those that change them. For friends, old and new. For homes, which are places of redemptive love. For routine task which give order to our days, and which from time to time, restore a needed humility to us. Most especially, we thank you for your action in Christ, by which our lives are measured, found wanting, and renewed. Help us to remember your gifts, that we may praise you with lives of joy and service. These things 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, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (organ music playing) (choir singing) Now, may the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. (choir singing) (organ playing)