

- Duke University Chapel service of worship first Sunday in Lent, February 27th, 1977. (instrumental music) (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song) (instrumental music)

- With the beauty such as it is outdoors today, I'm sure that the only wish unfulfilled at the moment with regard to our gathering here is that we are not gathering outside rather than in here. It is a day of beauty, a day of warmth and sunshine that all of us have longed for. And I'm sure rejoice in. As we honestly seek renewal in order to serve God, we begin by being honest about our own past failures, all of us have been guilty of postponing good words and actions until the time for saying and doing was passed. That being true then, I invite you to join with me as we confess before God, some of those things which we have done or have failed to do, (someone coughs) which have caused us to be less than the persons (someone coughs) whom God has called us to be. Let us confess our sins, forgive us most gracious God, for what we have done or said to increase the pain of the world. Pardon the unkind word, the impatient gesture, the hard and selfish deed, the failure to show sympathy and kindly help where we had the opportunity, but missed it. And enable us so to live, that we may daily do something to lessen the tide of human sorrow, and add to the sum of human happiness. Amen. (someone coughs) In the quietness of our own individual hearts. I invite you now to speak with God and listen (someone coughs) to the word from God. Our Lord has said, come to me all who labor and are heavy Laden, and I will give you rest. My friends in Christ receive now, the love and forgiveness and presence of Christ and find that rest. Amen. (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song) (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song)

- The Old Testament lesson comes from the third chapter of Lamentations verses 21 through 26. And from the seventh chapter of Micah verse seven. All this I take to heart and therefore I will wait patiently. The Lord's true love is surely not spent nor has his compassion failed. They are new every morning so great is his constancy. The Lord I say is all that I have. Therefore, I will wait for him patiently. The Lord is good to those who look for him to all who seek him. It is good to wait in patience and sigh for deliverance by the Lord. But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation my God will hear me. The gospel lesson comes from the 15th chapter of Luke verses one through four, will the congregation please rise? Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him and the Pharisees and the Scribes murmured saying, " this man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable, "what man of you having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it." May God grant us grace to hear his holy word and to grow in wisdom and understanding. (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song)

- Together let us affirm our faith. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human Jesus, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the spirit. We trust God who calls us to be the church to celebrate life and its fullness to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen our judge and our hope in life in death in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone, thanks be to God. The Lord be with you. (congregation murmurs) Let us pray. (clears throat) Oh God on such a day as this, when warmth and beauty and brightness and promise and hope of the new life of Springs surround us. We rejoice in the life that we are privileged to have and to enjoy. Surely we lift up our eyes to you from whence cometh our help. We thank you oh God, for all of the small and beautiful things of life that sometimes go unnoticed, but make our lives. We thank you for each dear experience, which brings us closer to you and nearer to one another. In your word oh God, Paul writes now abides faith, hope and love these three, but the greatest of these is love. We know, oh God that it is by your power and love that we're able to accept and to obey your commandments and even to seek to do your will. So we ask now, that you would increase our faith, maker of each of us and honest and growing believer, help us to trust in your grace when the clouds are dark. To accept and to live with the mysteries of life, to believe that all things do ultimately work together for good for those who love you. So we would ask now that you would increase our hope, give us the hope which sees things at their worst and yet refuses to despair. Hope which is able to fail and yet try again. Hope which knows disappointment and yet does not give in. And so we would ask now that you would increase our love, help us to love our neighbors as you love them. Our neighbors, oh God, who lived beside us and walk beside us day by day. Our neighbors across the hall or upstairs or downstairs or across the quad, who are hurting and lonely. Who need a word that life is hope and meaning. A word, an expression of love from us, help us to love you as you have first loved us. And above all, oh God, help us to love and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask that your spirit would cleanse the life of your church. Take away the bitterness and the divisions, the coldness and yes, the laziness that we may in this day and in this time show courage, share love, give hope and care as our Lord Jesus Christ came caring. So in these moments now oh God, when we have come apart to worship, to sing, to pray, to hear your word, read and proclaimed. We asked that you would receive us and renew us and empower us one by one surely, but also empower us in a united and uniting way. We give you thanks for Jesus Christ. Whom we remember in special ways in this holy season of Lent. Hear these words and hear oh God, the prayer, which we pray not a new but a fresh, which our Lord has taught us saying, 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, as we forgive (congregation murmurs) as we forgive those (congregation murmurs) (someone coughs) lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom the power and the glory for ever. Amen. (someone coughs) This Friday, the members of the University chorale will leave to begin their Spring tour. Our hope as they travel Northward, they can find weather as nice as it is here today. Leaving here on Monday, a week from tomorrow will be 120 or so members of the chapel choir to join the chorale with making a total of some 200 voices where on Tuesday, they will rehearse in Carnegie hall. And on Wednesday, along with the North Carolina Symphony will present a concert in Carnegie hall. So I'm sure that since this is the last time that the choir will lead us in worship before they leave either as chorale member or as choir members, I'm sure you would like to wish them all the best and pray God's blessings upon them. So I'm going to ask Ben, the choir members to stand now, if you will? Some of them will not be going but most all of them will. Many of the members of the chorale are also members of the choir. This is indeed not only a real thrill and blessed opportunity, one which brings much recognition to the university and to each of them

and to all of them together. But it is one of the rare opportunity when they have the privilege of singing praise to God. So will you join with me now in a moment of prayer, as I offer a word or two for them to God, let us pray. Oh God, in whose love we all move and act, by whose love we are all given different gifts, but by whose love also we're privileged to use our gifts in special ways. We pray oh God, a very special blessing on the members of the Duke University Chorale, each one, on Ben Smith, who will direct them. We pray oh God, a special blessing upon each member of the Duke Chapel choir may each one who has this special privilege and opportunity be filled with joy and goodness and happiness that their hearts might truly sing in praise to you as together with the members of the symphony. The music is lifted in your honor and for your glory, give them safety in their travels, give them happy times together and bring us all together again that we might worship here, in the name and in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen. Blessings on you all. (someone coughs) Tonight at seven o'clock Mr. Robert Parkins the Chapel Organist, will present his first concert on the New Benjamin N. Duke Memorial Organ. You're invited to come and to share in that concert, as I'm sure many of you have already been blessed by others who have prayed. We invite you tonight for this special concert at seven o'clock. Mr. Vance Torbert the third is our preacher for today. He is a third year law student. And as you notice in the bulletin he is a partner in the Trash Club, which prides itself on not taking itself too seriously in the law school. Perhaps we all might do well to ask to become honorary members of such a club at times, Vance. It is our privilege to have him preach for us today. (someone coughs) He did his undergraduate work at Princeton University and received a Master's degree from the University of West Florida. And in May will receive his Doctorate of Jurisprudence degree from Duke. And then will begin practice with a law firm in New York City. We trust that your experiences is here Vance, have been rewarding intellectually as well as spiritually. And now we listen to you as you bring God's word to us, welcome today.

- May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord our strength and our Redeemer of man. In act two of Robert Bolt's masterful portrayal of Sir Thomas More, A Man For All Seasons, More has just learned that parliament will pass an act requiring betrayal of his allegiance to the church. More, sensing the seriousness of his situation calms his worried daughter and son-in-law. Now listen Will and Meg you listened too God made the angels to show him splendor as he made animals for innocence and plants for their simplicity. But man he made to serve him wittily, in the tangle of his mind. If he suffers us to fall to such a case as there is no escaping, then we may stand to our tackle as best we can. And yes, Will, then we may clamor light champions if we have the spittle for it. And no doubt it delights God to see splendor where he only looked for complexity. But it's God's part not our own to bring ourselves to that extremity. Our natural business lies in escaping. The common man with capital letters who narrates the stage version, comments somewhat less eloquently. "You know the old adage? Better live rat than a dead lion." I'll make my basic point at the beginning so that when someone else asks you what the sermon was about, you at least stand a chance of remembering. The point is this, it's easy to get used to some romantic notion that we're born into some kind of slavery of the soul and that our life should be or is a struggle for or a search for freedom. Well, I think we're going about it wrongly. We're born into freedom and by freedom, I mean we're born without the conscious knowledge of God's salvation. And if we succeed in life, if we succeed in finding God's plan for our lives, if we succeed in life we start by surrendering. But, our natural business lies in escaping. David and Lisa, a marvelous film that was current about 15 years ago, concerned two teenagers undergoing psychiatric help at a special school. Lisa, suffering from a dictionary full of psychotic disorders resulting from lack of parental love, is missing. After a few frantic hours of

searching the telephone wait begins. David, her only friend and himself a patient, recalls her fascination with a statue of a mother and child and reasons you don't run away from something simply because you don't like it. You don't run away from something, you run to something. You don't escape from something, you escape to something. They find Lisa curled up in the arms of the statue. Lisa, unable to face her reality, left for a place she thought secure. It's not hard to draw parallels to ourselves. Acrophobia, the fear of high places. We've seen pictures of structural steelworkers walking on the frames of office buildings a dozen stories high, walking on beams no more than eight inches across. How many of us have imagined ourselves up there and thought, boy, if that was me, if you could ever get me up there in the first place, I'd probably just jump to get it over with, because I know I'd fall. If we actually were there, I'll bet that most of us would have the same death-grip on that beam that most preachers get on this railing. (congregation laughs) Fine, now suppose the I-beam is down on the ground. How many of us would show the slightest hesitancy about walking on the beam now? The first point is easy and clear, a dozen stories up where the risk-reward ratio goes right off the chart. We're very, very careful because mistakes are expensive. On the ground we'll gladly try handstands without the slightest care if we stay on or fall off the beam. The second point is perhaps not so clear. It seems to me that if we think of falling off the beam as taking Kierkegaard's leap of faith, transcending that boundary where knowledge must end and faith begin. Then notice please that when you're in the most danger is when you're closest to salvation. When your chances for spiritual awakening are least, that is when the beam is on the ground. You are free, not to use the word free. You are free to make light of faith because mistakes cost nothing. You can get back on the I-beam very easily. The problem lies in that few, if any of us would choose 12 story high handstands over zero story high handstands. The former is much too risky, too risky physically in the illustration, too risky spiritually in the analogy. Our natural business lies in escaping. Marlowe's doctor Faustus, the 11th hour has come. At midnight Faustus will end the 24 years of pleasure he bought from Lucifer at the price of his immortal soul. Faustus paces his room and cries, Ah Faustus now hast thou but one bare hour to live and then thou must be damned perpetually. Stand still you ever-moving spheres of heaven, the time may cease and midnight never come. Fair natures eye rise and rise again and make perpetual day or with this hour be but a year, a month, a week, a natural day that Faustus may repent and save his soul, runs slowly, slowly oh horses of the night. The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike, the devil must come and Faustus must be damned. Oh, I'll leap up to my God who pulls me down. Our natural business lies in escaping. I have five delightful Jerusalem cherry plants that I've raised from seed. When I was reading the passage from A Man For All Seasons, I recalled that in one very important respect, plants do praise God by their simplicity. My plants grow toward the light. Some more, some less, some can stand a lot, some are very little, but most all in one degree or another. Mankind as a rule, grows away from the light. Mankind seems as a rule, to seek darkness of spirit. Some few as Faustus, seek the darkness directly in Satanism. Most of the rest of us seek the darkness simply because we fail to seek the light. For most of us, our natural business lies in escaping. The truth is that few of us escaped so dramatically. Few of us walk on I-beams a dozen stories high, few of us are ever taken to a high mountain by the devil, shown the world's riches and have it offered to us for the price of our souls. Few of us are ever in a position where we're faced with the knowledge-faith leap directly. For me, our common enemy and one that is very real, our common enemy here is complacency. (someone coughs) Consider the plight of the complacent man. If necessity is the mother of invention, complacency is the step-child of security. However, complacency, security, whatever you call it has dire consequences. Herb Gardner in his magnificent play A Thousand Clowns, shows us invention in the form of our seldom-employed genius hero

Murray Burns and complacency in the form of his brother, Arnold, a man in a brown flannel suit. Murray is frightened, Arnold, five months ago I forgot what day it was. I'm on the subway on my way to work and I didn't know what day it was and it scared the hell out of me. I was sitting in the express, looking out the window same as every morning, watching the local stops go by in the dark with an empty head and my arms folded, not feeling great, not feeling rotten, just not feeling. And for a minute I couldn't remember, I didn't know, unless I really concentrated whether it was a Tuesday or a Thursday or a, for a minute, it could have been any day, Arnie, sitting in the train going through any day in the dark through any year, Arnie, it scares the hell out of me. You've got to know what day it is. You've got to know what's the name of the game and what the rules are with nobody else telling you. You have to own your own days and name them each one of them, every one of them or else the years go right by and none of them belong to you. (someone coughs) And that just ain't for weekends, kiddo. Murray is told off by the brown flannel Arnold, unfortunately for you Murray, you wanna be a hero. Maybe if a fella falls into a lake, you can jump in and save him but who gets opportunities like that in Midtown Manhattan, with all that traffic? I am willing to deal with the available world and I do not choose to shake it up but to live with it. I have a wife and children and business like they say is business. I am not an exceptional man, so it is possible for me to stay with things the way they are. I'm lucky, I'm gifted, I have a talent for surrender. I'm at peace, but you are cursed. You don't have the gift and I can see the torture of it. All I can do is worry for you but I will not worry for myself. You cannot convince me that I am one of the bad guys. I get up, I go, I lie a little, I peddle a little, I talk the talk I watched the rules. I will not apologize for it, I take pride, I am the best possible Arnold Burns. The sad truth is this, for every Murray Burns, there are a thousand Arnolds. Our natural business lies in escaping. (someone coughs)

Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* is a simple but powerful story of life and death in a small New England town. Emily, having died in child-birth is granted another look at a day in her life and she chooses her 12th birthday. Soon discovering that events move too fast for her, she can't bear to remain past breakfast. As she returns to her grave on the hill she asks the stage manager, "Do human beings ever realized life while they live it? Every, every minute?" The stage manager replies, " No, the saints and poets maybe, they do some." A bitter commentary comes from the deceased church organist, Simon Stimson. Now you know, that's what it was like to be alive, to move about in a cloud of ignorance to go up and down trampling, trampling on the feelings of those about you, to spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion or another that's the happy existence you wanted to go back to. Ignorance and blindness. Our town, says the author in our preface to a collection of his place is not offered as a speculation about the conditions of life after death. It is an attempt he says, to find a value above all price for the smallest events of our daily life. Mr. Wilder sought to emphasize the commonplace because we so often with the ordinary events in our life merge into a stream of unconsciousness, so that we need not face consciousness and it's implications. Our natural business lies in escaping. It is not generally known that once in hell you can take a day trip to heaven by bus. In C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, the master of fantasy does so and tells us what he's found. Hell he describes as an ever-expanding grey, rainy, featureless city, full of quarrelsome people. On his excursion to heaven, he learns that it is possible to remain there permanently, but only if you're willing to leave all your sins behind even those most precious. A spirit talks to the narrator concerning heaven and hell. Son, ye cannot in your present state understand eternity, but ye can get some likeness of it. If ye say the both good and evil when they are fully blown become retrospective. Not only this valley but all this earthly past will have been heaven to those who are saved. (someone coughs) Not only the twilight in that town, but all their life on earth too will be seen by the damned to have

been hell. In the actual language of the lost the words will be different no doubt. One will say that he has always served his country right or wrong. Another that he sacrificed everything to his art. Some that they've never been taken in and some that, thank God they've always looked after number one and nearly all that at least they've been true to themselves. The saved? What happens to them is best described as the opposite of a mirage. What seemed when they entered it to be the veil of misery turns out when they look back to have been a well. And were present experience saw only salt deserts, memory truthfully records that the pools were full of water. Hell is a state of mind. And every state of mind left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind is in the end hell. But heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakeable remains. I want to be alone. Hey, don't bother me now, can't you see I'm busy? Our natural business lies in escaping. Complacency is the set of Adidas track shoes. Well, it's tough to come up with good similes for everything. Complacency along with routine, habit and tedium. Complacency helps us escape the walk on the I-beam, escape the high mountain, escaped the leap of faith. Complacency not wanting to have to fight or surrender, not wanting to go either forward or back just sitting there in the pew with your arms folded keeping self in and God out. This is not something new or original in our time. The new English Bible's translation of the Lord's prayer we intoned a few minutes ago, the Lord's prayer in that translation where we generally say, " and lead us not into temptation", the New English Bible reads, " and do not bring us to the test." Our natural business lies in escaping. All right, escape, run, hide, what good will it do you? Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai go to the great city of Nineveh, go now and denounce it for its wickedness stares me in the face. But Jonah set out for Tarshish to escape from the Lord, that his escape across the sea out of Israel. Escape across what was considered to be the kingdom of death and escape to the farthest known reach of the world. When the storm rose Jonah was thrown overboard as a sacrifice but the Lord ordained that a great fish should swallow Jonah. And for three days and three nights he remained in its belly. The sojourn by way of digestion had the desired effect on Jonah. Sometime after the fish spewed Jonah out onto the dry land, the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, go to the great city of Nineveh, go now and denounce it in the words I give you. Jonah obeyed at once and went to Nineveh. Our natural business lies in escaping but our unnatural business lies in surrendering. Our unnatural business lies in surrendering. I recall my first experience with Brussels sprouts. (congregation laughs) The first time I saw one, my parents wanted to know if I would peel it or eat it or sneak it down under the table to our Springer Spaniel. Without knowing why I decided that those things were not meant for men to eat. (congregation laughs) I was no fan of cabbage and those things looked and smelled like little cabbages. However, when I realized that I would rot right there in my chair (someone coughs) unless I ate at least one, I got this feeling that I may as well do it so down the hatch and I liked it. I became the only kid on my block to like Brussels sprouts. (congregation laughs) When I knew, the Brussels sprouts were going to get me, when I knew that there was no escaping, then and only then would I try one? Also, I could not escape the fair but heavy hand of my father. He was there. I could see him. He ate his Brussels sprouts with a smile. (congregation laughs) Can we escape from the Lord? I could not escape the love and concern of my parents for my diet. But can we escape the love and concern of the Lord for our souls? Here the Psalmist, oh, Lord thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down sitting and my uprising, thou understandest my thought from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down and art acquainted with all my ways. Wither shall I go from thy spirit or wither shall I flee from my presence? If I ascend up into heaven, behold, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there, if I take the wings of the

morning and flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand hold me, thy right hand shall lead me. It is only when we come to realize when we confess to ourselves that there is no escaping from the love of God made manifest in Christ. It is only then that we can cry aloud with the Psalmist search me O God and know my thoughts. Try me and know my heart and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Our unnatural business lies in surrendering. Remember what we said about escaping? We don't escape from something but to something. That's why the saints and the poets throw up their hands and agony we have it all backwards. We're really running from something to nothing. God has a personal interest in you. God has a plan for your life but you can't hear it at all, unless as the song goes you turn your radio on. You can't hear it distinctly if you're too busy, if you don't want to get involved. If you've got a death-grip on that I-beam. We can know God's plan for our lives, we can know that inner peace that comes when God works in us. We can know the joy that comes when Jesus finds us in the wilderness. And we start all this. Not as the proverb goes by taking a single step but by not taking that step, by surrendering. We take the leap of faith not by a rash act of the body but by surrender of the soul. By surrender of the soul. By admitting to yourself that there is no escaping. By raising your hand in the wilderness, in the tangle of your mind and saying, "here I am Lord." The prophet says, but as for me, I will look to the Lord I will wait for the God of my salvation my God will hear me. Jesus said, what man of you having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? We simply stop running. We stop our stream of unconsciousness for a moment and surrender. Rest assured, rest assured indeed that Jesus is coming after you. (someone coughs) Rest assured that you can not outrun the love of God. Rest, rest assured, for this is not a message of hope, this is a message of certainty. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers in the world as it is, or the world as it shall be. In the forces of the universe in heights or depths nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song)

- Secure in the certainty of your endless and unfailing love. Oh God, we do rest assure accept these gifts which we offer, but more especially oh God, accept that part of our lives, (someone coughs) which we now give to your keeping and your directing. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (instrumental music) (someone coughs) (instrumental music) (congregation singing hymn song) Now with heads not bowed and eyes not closed. Will you receive this blessing? Which I offer you in the name of Christ, the love of God, the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, the communion and fellowship of the holy spirit be with you and with those whom you love, now and forever. (congregation singing hymn song) (instrumental music)