

(organ playing) (organ playing) (organ playing) (organ playing) (organ playing) (organ playing) (organ playing) (organ playing) (Reverend Willimon mumbles)

- This evening aside from the hymn, the (mumbles) ensemble will be giving a free concert as part of our summer arts program. Also, on June 14th at five p.m. (mumbles) giving a demonstration (mumbles) You can see for yourself on June 14th. (Reverend Willimon mumbles) Dr. Peter (mumbles) from Johannesburg, South Africa will be visiting and preaching in our Sunday service. And, now let's continue our worship of the Lord. (traditional hymn singing) (organ playing) (organ playing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing)

- Let us pray together, the opening collect. Holy God, You have given us grace by the confession of the faith of Your holy church to acknowledge the mystery of the eternal trinity, and in the power of Your divine majesty to worship the unity, keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see Your eternal glory, one God, now and forever, amen.

- Let us pray together. 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 is taken from the book of Deuteronomy. For ask now of the days that are passed which were before you since the days that God created humanity upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a God speaking out of the midst of a fire as you have heard and still live? Or has any God ever attempted to go and take a nation from the midst of another nation by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and by great terrors according to all that the Lord, your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord is God. There is no other. Out of heaven, God spoke to you in order to discipline you, and on earth, you saw God's great fire, and you heard God's words out of the midst of the fire, and because God loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, and brought you out of Egypt with God's own presence and great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance as that this day. Know therefore this day and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is no other. This ends the reading of the first lesson. Thanks be to God.

Man: Let us stand and chant responsively to song. ♪ Rejoice in the Lord, all you righteous ♪ ♪ Delight in praise, oh You are bright ♪ ♪ Praise the Lord ♪ (traditional hymn singing) ♪ Sing to the Lord our new song ♪ ♪ Play skillfully on the strings with loud shouts ♪ (traditional hymn singing) ♪ The Lord loves righteousness and justice ♪ ♪ The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord ♪ (traditional hymn singing) ♪ The Lord gathers the waters of the sea as in our pardon ♪ ♪ And puts the deeps in stored houses ♪ (traditional hymn

singing) ♪ For the Lord spoke, and it came to be ♪ ♪ The Lord commanded, and it stood forth ♪ (traditional hymn singing) ♪ The council of the Lord stands forever ♪ ♪ The thoughts of God's heart to all generations ♪ (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing)

Man: Be seated.

- The second lesson is taken from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Examine yourselves to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you failed to meet the test. I hope You will find out that we have not failed, but we pray, God, that you may not do wrong. Not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth but only for the truth, for we are glad when we are weak and You are strong. What we pray for is your improvement. I write this while I am away from you in order that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. Finally, my friends, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with the Holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. This ends the reading of the second lesson. Thanks be to God. This reading is from the gospel according to St. Matthew. Now, the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them, and when they saw Jesus, they worshiped Jesus, but some doubted, and Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and I am with you always to the close of the age." And, this, my friends, ends the reading of the gospel. Thanks be to God. (organ playing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing)

- "Did any people ever hear God speaking out of the midst "of a fire as you have heard? "Or has any God ever attempted to go and take a nation "for himself? "Out of heaven, he let you hear his voice." In a pastoral counseling course in seminary, some professor told me that a mark of good counseling was distance. A counselor has got to be close enough to the counselee to care, and yet distant enough, objectively, dispassionately, to reflect and to advise. Professional distance, isn't that what they call it? It is that distance assumed by doctors and lawyers and ministers who work with people, so that they're involved but not too closely involved, and I confess that I've never been too good at professional distance. A while back, a senior came by the office to tell me that he had decided to apply to seminary, and he said, "I know that you can't tell me what to do, "but I'd be interested if you've got any suggestions "about which seminary I ought to attend, "and I said well, you're right, I can't tell you what to do. "It's your life. "You're a member of a denomination other than my own. "I can't tell you what to do. "By the way, which seminary are you thinking of attending?" And he said, "Union, in New York," and I said "No, no! That's all wrong for you! "You wouldn't like it there! "You're supposed to go to Princeton! "Your theology would be better suited to there. "You would like Princeton much better!" and he said, "I'm glad that you can't tell me what to do." (laughter) And, I said look, "I flunked non-directive counseling "in seminary." I've never been too good at professional

distance, and I guess, I hope the reason is that I care. Distance, nearness. At the risk of you losing you before the sermon begins, I want to lay my cards on the table and say to you that this is to be a sermon about the Trinity, and therefore, about God. I know that the British preacher Colin Morris says that any preacher with a grain of sense will call in sick on Trinity Sunday, and under no circumstances, would you attempt to preach on the doctrine of the Trinity, but throwing caution to the wind, here we go. The Trinity, the affirmation that God is Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, strikes many people as some kind of mystery of mathematics. How can one God really equal three persons? But the truth is not a mystery of mathematics, it's a debate about who God is, and I'm betting, I'm hoping that that's why you're here today. Even if you don't know that's why you're here today, you're wondering who God really is, and how it stands between us and God. That was the first question of the Hebrew children after they were free, liberated from Egyptian slavery, they were free, yes, but also hungry, and out of their hunger, they asked, "Is God among us or not?" Exodus 17. And that, I'm betting, is your question this Sunday morning: is God among us or not? Now, Professor Steinberg from Temple University, after studying hundreds of teenagers and their parents, has developed a theory of responsive parenting. Simply put, Dr. Steinberg believes that the single most important key to good relations between parents and teenagers is the parents' constant ability in word and deed to respond to the behavior and personality of the adolescent child. In fact, Dr. Steinberg claims that the more loquacious the parent-- the more time the parent spends talking to and listening to the teenager-- the better adjusted the teenager. And that confirms an opinion of mine, namely, that there is some kind of relationship between good teaching and a lot of talking. The best teachers always seem to be the biggest talkers. I mean, take Sandy Cohen, Durham County Teacher of the Year, or Star Braswell over at Hope Valley Elementary. If you visit their classrooms, as I did, you will find that from the time the bell rings at 8:00 a.m. until the bell rings again at 2:30, it's: "Class, today, we're going to study prepositions-- "that will be enough, John, "would you please get your book and sit down? "So, is this Monday morning or something? "Come on, somebody tell me something about prepositions-- "I don't know, "Gloria, can you? "John, why are you still walking around? "Oh, that's good, Gloria, very good. "Now, somebody else tell me something else "about prepositions-- "John, any time you wanna sit down, "that'll just be fine with me, "we're only having school here-- "Okay, Sharon, good." Communication is the single most important factor in marriage, says counselors David and Vera Mace. I'll go a step further to say that communication is marriage. Marriage is communication--and so is faith. As believers, we can be glad that, as Deuteronomy says our God is among all Gods distinguished for his loquaciousness. Israel's God loves to talk, likes nothing better than in word and deed to communicate, to have communion, to make community, divine closeness. Has there ever been a God, Deuteronomy asks, that wanted to have a people like you, that spoke out of the heavens to you? Paul says that faith comes through hearing

--and so does the church. Presumably, if God had not wanted to talk, we wouldn't be here. We, the church, Israel, are the result of divine communication, divine closeness. Now, come with me to the fourth century, and let's listen in on a debate between Athanasius and Arius. Here is the heart of the debate between Athanasius and Arius: is Jesus Christ really God or not? Athanasius affirmed the Nicene Creed when it said that Jesus is indeed begotten of the Father, God of God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. In other words, Christ was not made out of nothing, as are we, but he was begotten. He was generated from the very substance of God. When we look at Jesus, we're looking at God. Jesus is God's full communication of himself. When we look at Jesus, this Nazarene, we're seeing as

much of God as we ever hope to see because in this One is the One who is of one being with the Father. Begotten, not made-- and that was the affirmation which was too much for Arius. Arius rejected the notion that Jesus was fully divine in this way. "After all," asked Arius, "what makes God, God?" "God is God because the great, high, distant, lifted-up God "can never be fully communicated. "Divinity is self-contained. "Divinity is fully complete within itself; "it doesn't need anything else. "Being completely sufficient, self-sufficient, "the Deity has no need to extend itself "or to communicate itself. "Divinity is absolute." Arius rejected the notion that so exalted and self-contained a God should directly involve himself with his creatures, because to do so would be to dirty the hands of this absolute, pure God-- to risk this great God's becoming dependent upon or involved with his little lowly creatures. For Arius, God is more like Roger, the President of General Motors, who deals with people only through his receptionist than like Chrysler's Iacocca, who walks up and down the assembly line and makes commercials. A recent American researcher with the Sony Corporation found that just by daring to ask to speak to the president of Sony, a vice president can be fired. This distance, distance, that's what Arius wanted to maintain. The Trinity is a result of a debate about God's distance or nearness. Is Jesus God, or is he only a kind of intermediary? For Arius, the Nicene Creed and its delineation of the status of Christ and the Holy Spirit as integrally connected, intimate natures of God was a kind of pagan vulgarization of the righteous God. God, God is great, God is up on high, not dependent, not derived, not divisible, not deficient. Arius asks, "who would want a God "who needs us for anything?" "The Son," said Arius, "is not equal to God in any way, "but he is made out of nothing by God. "The Father is alone God, "completely alien to the Son in essence." I suppose in all of Christian history, there has probably never been so noble or exalted a depiction of God's supreme otherness, God's holy distance, than that of Arius. His whole concern was to honor God, to set God up on high where God ought to be. Lifted up high above the contingent, contaminated world of his creatures. Distance, distance. Enter Athanasius, who argued against Arius that Christ's complete, total dependency upon God was supreme validation that Jesus was indeed God. "Being self-contained, superior, distant, is not "the essential mark of divinity," said Athanasius, "but maybe we make distance the mark of God "because above all things, we, human beings, "treasure independence and detachment." I think we would bow before independence before we would bow before God. We imagine that God relates to the world the same way that we would relate to the world if we were God, and for us humans, there can be nothing any worse than to be relegated to dependency on somebody else. "I'm just not ready for marriage 'cause I don't wanna be "dependent on somebody else. "I got to keep my options open." Saving for retirement? "Oh yes, yes, we certainly don't want to be dependent "on our children in our old age." "I'll be glad when I get my degree, "and I can stop being dependent on my old man." It's a fearful thing to us humans to realize that there is another person who can't keep her distance from me, who needs me, and maybe even more frightening is the realization that I need her. Oh, the great comforting distance. Arius felt that the Nicene Creed had dangerously compromised the notion of a distant, absolute God with its affirmation that Jesus, as the Son of God, is dependent to, answerable to, generated by God. Arius asked what kind of God needs manifestations of himself in order to be God? What kind of God would lure himself to dirty His hands in human flesh, to walk the dusty streets of a place like Nazareth? If absolute distance, independence, is the decisive mark of divinity, if it is not the decisive mark of divinity, if distance is not the true Godness, then what is? Here's a clue. The gospel of John says that everything the Father has has been given to the Son. Or in chapter three of John's gospel: because the Father loves the Son, he has given everything to the Son, everything. According to John's gospel, then, what is the decisive mark of God? Giving, self-giving. It is the

love by which this God is constantly, effusively communicating himself to his beloved Son. Between this Father and this Son, there is complete, total, mutual self-giving, and so when we look at the Son, we're really looking at the Father as well (John 12:44). Arius' God is a distant God who tenaciously holds on to his divinity, keeping his distance from contingent, painful world of humanity. But Athanasius' God, the God of the Creed, is a dynamic God, eternally engaged in self-giving, self-disclosure, self-communication. The Father holds nothing back from the Son. All the glory that God has got is given to the Son, and the Son, in turn, gives all glory back to the Father. The Holy Spirit, linking the two together, constantly giving. When Arius charged that Athanasius was decimating divine distance, Athanasius counter-charged that Arius' God is an agonos theos. An agonos theos, a sterile God, a sterile God who doesn't generate or beget anything, who doesn't shine, who doesn't reveal-- but the close, triune God of the Trinity is always communicating and shining and giving. When we look at Jesus, we see as much of this God as we hope to see because Jesus is totally one with this God. On the other hand, Jesus is constantly turning us back to God because Jesus is busy giving back to the Father the glory that's been given to him, and that's why our frequent symbol for the Trinity is three interlocking circles, constantly turning within themselves, showing love coming from and going back, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not some mathematical absurdity that one plus one plus one equals one. The Trinity is a grouping to try to talk about God. What makes God, God? God's perfection is precisely in God's closeness rather than in God's distance, in God's continual communicativeness rather than in God's inscrutable silence. Closeness, closeness-- and this was a God revealed to us in Jesus--close. Remember Jesus told a popular story about a father, had two sons? One asked for his inheritance, and what did the father do? He just gave it to him, and when this prodigal son has blown all of his inheritance, the father welcomed him back home and then gave him a party. And when the older brother pouted because he wanted a party, the father didn't just give him a party, the father gave him absolutely everything, and then, that story worked out so well. Jesus told about another one about a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, he fell in a ditch. He was beaten up, left for half-dead, and he was passed by by all the good religious people because they had to keep their distance, but then, there was a Samaritan, and he stopped, and he looked down at the man in the ditch, and he gave him a quarter to call the highway patrol. No no, that's what we might've done. No, Jesus said the Samaritan not only stopped, he not only risked his own life, but he ripped up his Brooks Brothers suit and made bandages out of it. He put the bleeding man on the leather seats of his BMW. He took him down to the hospital. He gave the hospital every dime he had, and he said "When I get back, spend anything you need, "I'll give you even more money." You see, when this God gets to giving, he just doesn't know when to stop. Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, is our daily experience of God's communicative extravagance. Oh, but we are so often like Arius. Our God is high and distant, exalted, and lifted up. Our God does not dirty his holy hands in human affairs. Our God is exalted and honored and on high if we've got to nail him up there ourselves, and that's just what we did. We nailed him up there ourselves, hands and feet, and after we got him so high and lifted up off the earth, he turned around and said, "When I am lifted up, "I'm going to draw everything to myself." We don't offer this God any compliment when we impute to this God the same distance through which we encircle our lives. Here's a God who's always willing to stoop, who never stops giving, a God who welcomes, even seeks our prayer and our praise, our good deeds, and yes, even our sin. In the 55th chapter of the prophet Isaiah, the prophet hears God say, "My thoughts are not your thoughts. "My ways are not your ways. "As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts deeper than your thoughts, which would lead us to think, "You know, maybe Arius was right. "God really is distant and far.



mercy boundless, and Your nearness irresistible. You speak to us in all Your creation, in all that is beautiful, good, and true. Our lips and our voices can never give You the praise and thanksgiving you deserve. As a symbol of our gratitude, we raise to You these gifts of toil and love. Bless them for service in Your eternal kingdom. Bless the giver. Oh God, by Your spirit, free us to live better than it is in us to do and to walk faithfully with Christ, our Lord and Savior, who has the words of eternal life and who has taught us to pray saying our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, They 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've trespassed 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 and ever, amen. And, now, oh eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You have gone before us in wind, fire, and cloud throughout the ages. Go before us now in peace and joy, nourishing us with the sunlight of Your holly presence so that we may grow in all spiritual graces, full of victory and hope this day and forever more, amen. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (organ playing) (organ playing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing) (traditional hymn singing)

Reverend Via: Let us go forth in the name of Christ.

Congregation: Praise be to God. (organ playing)