

(soft music) (anticipatory music) (soft music) (soft music continues) (indistinct singing) (joyful music)
(singers drowned by church organ)

- Let us join and confessing our sins to the Lord. First through words of corporate confession, and then through the silence of private and personal confession. Lord God almighty, forgive your church. It's wealth among the poor, it's fear among the unjust, it's cowardice among the oppressed. Forgive us, your children, our lack of confidence in you. Our lack of hope in your reign, our lack of faith in your presence, our lack of love in your mercy. Restore us to your covenant with your people. Bring us to true repentance, teach us to accept the sacrifice of Christ. Make us strong with the comfort of your Holy Spirit. Break us where we are strong. Make us where we are weak. Shame us where we trust ourselves. Name us, where we have lost ourselves. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. The God of our faith, who is always more ready to hear, than we to pray, and who gives us more than we either desire or deserve pours down upon us an abundance of mercy, pardoning and delivering us from our sins, confirming and strengthening us in all goodness, and bringing us the promise of life everlasting, Blessing and honor glory and power, be unto the Lord our God, amen. (soft music) ♪ We praise thee oh God ♪ ♪ We acknowledge thee to be the Lord ♪ ♪ All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting ♪ ♪ To Thee all Angels cry aloud ♪ ♪ The Heavens and all the Powers therein ♪ ♪ To Thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry ♪ ♪ Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth ♪ ♪ Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of Thy Glory ♪ ♪ The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee ♪ ♪ The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise Thee ♪ ♪ The noble army of Martyrs praise Thee ♪ ♪ The Holy Church throughout all the world ♪ ♪ Doth acknowledge Thee ♪ ♪ The Father of an infinite Majesty ♪ ♪ Thine honorable, true, and only Son ♪ ♪ Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter ♪ ♪ Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ ♪ ♪ Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father ♪ ♪ When thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man ♪ ♪ Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb ♪ ♪ When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death ♪ ♪ Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers ♪ ♪ Thou sittest at the right hand of God ♪ ♪ In the Glory of the Father ♪ ♪ We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge ♪ ♪ We therefore pray Thee ♪ ♪ Help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed ♪ ♪ With Thy precious blood ♪ ♪ Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints ♪ ♪ In glory everlasting ♪ ♪ O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine heritage ♪ ♪ Govern them and lift them up forever ♪ ♪ Day by day, we magnify Thee ♪ ♪ And we worship Thy Name ever, world without end ♪ ♪ Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin ♪ ♪ O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us ♪ ♪ O Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us as our trust is in Thee ♪ ♪ O Lord, in Thee have I trusted ♪ ♪ Let me never be confounded ♪ ♪ Let me never be confounded ♪ Let us hear God's holy word from the Old Testament, from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, beginning with the seventh verse, "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing. A land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper, and you shall eat and be full and you shall bless the Lord, your God, for the good land he has given you, but take heed lest you forget the Lord your God, by not keeping his commands and his ordinances and his statutes, which I command you this day. Lest when you have eaten and are full and have built goodly houses and live in them and when your herds and flocks multiply and your

silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up and you forget that the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground, where there was no water. Who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you to do you good in the end." Please rise for the reading of the gospel. Reading from an excerpt, from the good news according to Mark translated by Reynolds Price, comes this word from the eighth chapter of Mark, beginning with the 31st verse. "And Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him and began to teach them that the Son of Man must endure many things and be refused by the elders, chief priests and scholars, and be killed, and after three days, rise again. He said the thing plainly. Peter taking him aside began to warn him, but he, turning round and seeing his disciples, warned Peter and said, 'Get behind me Satan, since you think not of God's things, but of men's things.' And calling the crowd to him, with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and lift his cross and follow me, for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever will lose his life because of me and the good news will save it. For how does it help a man to get the whole world, but forfeit his soul? For what can a man give to redeem his soul? Whoever is ashamed of me in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels.' And he said to them, 'Amen, I tell you, that there are some of those standing here who shall never know death till they see the reign of God come in power.'" May God bless the reading and hearing of this holy word. (soft music) ♪ Glory to the Father ♪ ♪ And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ Is now and ever shall be ♪ ♪ World without end ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪

- Let us affirm what we believe. 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 and life beyond death. God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

- And with your spirit.

- Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God. We offer up to you in prayer this morning, our hopes, our fears and our lives. Here are our hopes, oh Lord. As students, faculty, employees, alumni, and visitors to this campus, we lift up to you, Lord, our hopes for this university, may it continue to widen the horizons of those who study here, provide a decent and humane workplace for those who are its employees and sustain a climate that nurtures and stimulates the pursuit of truth and knowledge. As worshipers who come before you this morning, from many places and many denominational backgrounds, we lift up to you, our hopes for your church. We pray that the people of God in this generation, may be as true to your purposes as those who came before us. Help us we pray, to show forth the presence of Christ in the world, in which we live and to show our unity with all who believe in you. As women and as men caught in a world of change, we lift up our hopes for peace and for justice, for all your children, here in this city, throughout our land, and across the globe. We pray especially, for the people of the Middle East and Northern Ireland and Southern Africa and wherever pain and suffering, set brother against brother and sister against sister. Oh Lord, we also lift up to

you this morning our fears, we are fearful of so much, Lord. We fear people who are different from us, who are younger or older, of a different color or station or nationality. Help us, we pray, to know that all people are your children and give us the courage to reach out across the divisions of age and class and race, to recognize the potential, the dignity, and the God given worth of each person no matter how different or strange she or he may appear to us and help us too, oh Lord, to overcome our fear of the unknown, of the future which awaits us, give us strength to accept illness and the loss of loved ones. Give us we pray, the courage to help others overcome their fears and give us the imagination to find new ways to respond to the needs of those around us. And finally, oh Lord, we pray for ourselves. Not with pride nor for selfish reasons but because we know that we need your presence in our lives if we are to truly serve you in thought and word and deed. Be with us in times of trouble and doubt. Use us to fulfill your purposes on this planet and keep us and our loved ones safe in your loving care. We offer up these prayers in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who when gathered with his disciples, taught them to pray together 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 and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. 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.

- There is a song that was popular sometime ago entitled, "I left my heart in San Francisco." Well, I like many of you left, not only my heart, but much of my voice in the football stadium yesterday. So I ask you to bear with me this morning. It was a great day. A great game. And a word of congratulations and commendation, I think is in order, to the coaches and the players of both teams. The 26 seniors from Duke who will soon be graduating, have meant much to this place and to all of them, we wish our best. Let us pray. Oh Lord, let the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, as you are our strength and our Redeemer, amen. There's a powerful piece of dialogue in George Bernard Shaw's play, "St. Joan," where the Archbishop of Rheims tells Joan that she must be in love with religion, Joan brightens up and responds to the Archbishop and says, "Why I never really thought of that. Is there any harm in it?" And the Archbishop replies, "My dear, there is no harm in it but there is great danger and there is intended to be the cost." What is the cost? What is the cost to be a follower of Jesus Christ? To be a believer in Jesus Christ? What is the cost to be a disciple of Jesus, the Christ? What is the cost to the church to be under the Lordship of Christ? What indeed is the cost to you? Or to me? I read a statement by one James McDougall Black recently, where he said, "There are people who always tried to explain the highest by the lowest." We often try to do that with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is we try to take the highest, that is the gospel, and explain it by the lowest, that is in terms of its demands as we see them. Jesus, in this passage, which we read for our gospel lesson for today, gathered the multitudes to him, along with the disciples. This means that he was not talking just to his friends or just to his closest or just to his chosen disciples. He was talking to a crowd. To all the people who had gathered around. To everyone, to anyone, to all, to each, to all of us today, to you, to me. With apologies for the sexist language, which I have difficulty in trying to translate, the words, read like this, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, for whoever would save his life will surely lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Those are stark, hard, harsh, demanding words. Whoever thinks that being Christian is fun and games, or is easy or is light stuff or is easy going or is a soft touch has just not read or does not understand the gospel of our Lord or at least the

gospel as Mark gives it to us. This is tough. This is costly. This is demanding. There is no cheap grace here and why should there be? Why should it not cost us to follow the Christ? As DT Niles, the late great, brilliant churchman from India wrote once, "It cost God an incarnation and a crucifixion to be gracious to us. For God to be loving toward us, cost his son, in birth, in life, in death. Yay even in resurrection." And for us to be obedient to God, then, what is the cost? Jesus said, "Whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever will lose his life for my sake and the sake of the good news will find it." The time that Mark wrote this word, it had a very literal meaning. If you made it known that you were a Christian, then you stood a good chance of being killed or put in prison. Therefore, to keep from being killed or being put in prison, those who tried to save their lives by not acknowledging their faith, saved their lives physically, but lost their lives spiritually and eternally. But those who were willing to lose their lives by acknowledging and openly professing Christ, would likely be martyred. But the loss of their lives physically, would mean that their lives had been saved in Christ, and for eternity. I read a word the other day, that really brought me up sharply, which said the importance of moral choices, is never seen clearly if the dimension of eternity is allowed to drop out of our thinking. The importance of moral choices is never seen clearly, if the dimension of eternity is allowed to drop out of our thinking. I don't know about you, but I often forget that. I often forget the dimension of eternity in many of my choices. Thus, I end up trying to save my life by holding onto it and then I realized that I've lost it. I very seldom am willing to lose my life for Christ and the gospel, in this, I don't save it. This is a very strange but true paradox about life. One that holds truth for us in practical, day-to-day terms, as well as in the dimension of eternity. The father who tries to save his life by claiming all or most of his time for himself and not sharing much of himself or his time with his children, rarely does not save his life. He loses both his life and his children's. The roommate who keeps telling you that he or she is busy, that she or he must study and work for herself or himself, and doesn't have time for you or for others, really ends up not saving life, but losing it. The football player or basketball player who says, he's got to hold back and save some of his time and talent and energy for himself and can't get it for the team, ends up really not saving his life, but losing both his and the team's. You can't find life by holding onto it. The tighter we squeeze life, the more we try to hold on to it, the more we hold back or hold on or refuse to risk or share or give or open up or let out, or the more we try to save our lives on our own, and for ourselves, the more likely Jesus says we are to lose it. Then when we really are willing to risk, to dare, to be venturesome, to offer our lives to some cause greater than we, to some other rather than self, or to some others rather than self. When we're willing to give our lives, to lose our lives in Christ. When you have had that happen in any moment or any given experience, then you know what it is to find and experience life. Only one life will soon be past the poet says, and only what's done for God and others, will last. I don't like to hear that. I'm really a pretty low risk, tight and closed in, no dare, little give, self-centered, selfish, take care of old number one kind of guy, really. And Jesus has a word for me. A word of judgment, but a word of promise, the word of judgment, I find very hard, but the word of promise I find most attractive. And Jesus is very clear and direct and disturbing. "If you try to save your life, you will lose it." That's all there is to it. If you're willing to lose your life for my sake, you will find it, rejoice, hallelujah, forever and ever, that's it. It's just that simple. So it is with that line, but the cost. What is the cost to follow Jesus the Christ? To deny oneself, Jesus says, that's what it costs. Deny in this passage has been translated in many ways, in many different versions, not to accept self, to forget self, not to worship oneself, not to belong to oneself any longer, to undo one's own way of thinking, to leave oneself to the side, to leave one's own way behind or as Reynolds Price translates it in his translation, which is soon to be published in a book of translations of his, of Old and New Testament readings. He says, "It is to be

translated to disown oneself." Now it does not mean just giving up some of our little habits and pleasures. It does not mean just periodically giving up smoking or drinking or having no sweets or no desserts during the season of lent. It really means that we renounce our rights and our prerogatives to give up our own will for God's will. Now let's be sure though, that to deny oneself, does not mean that one is to debase or to belittle oneself. We've had enough of that kind of gospel preaching. One must think well of oneself. Indeed, think quite well of oneself, even love oneself. Not as Paul warns us, not to think more highly than we ought to think, but to think with sober judgment and with high regard, but we're not to demean or castigate ourselves, enough of that. Think well, care about, love oneself, and then be willing to deny that good, noble, virtuous, worthy self, for the sake of Jesus the Christ. As one writer puts it for us, Christianity is simply humane action for Jesus at the cost of myself. But I do very little denying of myself. I don't know about you. I eat three (scoffs) and often sometimes four or five or more good meals every day. I sleep quite comfortably. I live in a beautiful house. I drive either one of two, very good cars we own, anytime I want to. I use most of my time as I want to, granted it's mostly in my work. But I do not deny myself with much of my time. I have a good income. And for one who follows Jesus, who said to those who were the first disciples, as he sent them out, he said, you remember, "My friends, as you go out preaching and teaching and healing two by two, don't even take an extra tunic for you. Don't even take an extra coat. Don't even take an extra pair of shoes. Don't even take any food. Don't even take any money." As a follower of one who said that to the first disciples, I live embarrassingly well. The late great sick comedian, Lenny Bruce singed me good when he said, "I know in my heart, by pure logic, that anyone who claims to be a member of the church of Christ is a pure hustler if he has two suits in a world in which most people have none. And I look in my closet and you look in your closet, anybody here care to argue about that? When Jesus says, "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself or herself." That word comes as judgment to me, and I wonder, is the cost too high? Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him or her take up his own cross or her own cross." Today, we think of bearing one's cross as putting up with some petty annoyance or major affliction. That is, we think of bearing one's cross as bearing patiently, whatever God sends our way. And my friends, I know this morning, that some of you here in the chapel and others of you who are at home or in the hospital or in a nursing center, your cross may indeed be some chronic disease or affliction or disorder that will never be healed, except in eternity. And you must, with God's grace, bare your cross. But then there are others of us who make a mockery of this passage and we insult the cross of Christ when we talk about our cross, which we must bear. For some of us, think that a temporary sadness or grief situation is a cross. Now, it may be a tragedy and it may be heartbreaking, but very seldom are these matters of being a cross. Some of us even dare to speak of a financial loss as a cross that we must bear. Some of us even speak of our own personality shortcomings as my cross. You know, I have an explosive temper or I have a bad disposition, or I have an uncontrollable anger, or I have a lack of sensitivity, or I have a tendency to procrastinate or I am impatient, or I am intolerant. And I say that any one, or maybe several of these is simply who I am and that's the cross I must bear. And some of us even talk quite piously about the cross we must bear. All of these may be bad or undesirable or unfortunate, but to speak of these experiences as characteristic or these experiences and characteristics, as if they were a cross, is to treat lightly this most demanding word from our Lord. To take up our cross, is to make a very deliberate and a free choice, as did Christ. To take up a burden, which could be avoided. To take upon ourselves some responsibility and obedience to God, which we really could evade. It means the choice of taking upon ourselves, the burdens of other people and their very lives, of caring for them as if we were caring for our very selves, of serving Christ and preparing for God's kingdom. Of putting

ourselves on God's side in the struggle against evil and injustice and hate and bitterness. To take up the cross means to choose deliberately, a way or a stance or a position or an action or a statement, that may well cost in terms of my position or my power or my prestige or my person. And I'm here to tell you this morning, that I'm not really willing to take up many or maybe not even any crosses that will cause harm or injury to me or my name or my image or my reputation or my good situation in life. I really don't want to do things for Christ that will cost me. I was teaching a class in a study of the gospel of Mark this summer out at Lambeth College, in Jackson, Tennessee, and we were talking about this passage. There were 42 of us in the class. We were talking about what it is to be a follower of Christ, to be Christian, to take up your cross, to live a faithful life. And I told them about an experience in our family. One morning, one of our daughters came to me and said, "Daddy, I had a terrible, terrible nightmare. A dream that the United States was taken over by the communists. And since communists don't believe in God and want you to believe in just the state, they were getting rid of all of the people who did not believe in the state. And since you were a preacher, and since you believe in God as the ultimate source of power. And you believe in being obedient to God, you were one of the first they came and took away and I saw you go." It's rather frightening. But as I told that to the class out there, one of the members of the class immediately spoke up and said, "No danger, don't sweat it. No danger of the communists taking any of us Christians, away first." And I said, "Wow." He said, "We really don't believe enough to be any threat to anybody." Well, I don't know about you, but for me, taking up a cross is something I really do not want to do. So when I hear these words of Jesus, I wonder, is the cost too high? Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." When other people think of one who follows Jesus, do you think they think about you? When you think about those people who follow Jesus, do you think about yourself as one of those? If so, what do you think of yourself as one who follows the Christ? What does it mean? How has following Jesus affected your life or affected others through your life? How do you stack up with what you think a follower of Jesus should be? Or with what you think Jesus would have you be? To follow Jesus, means to be, or to stay in the presence of Jesus, to be in his company, to be one with him in spirit and in deed. To follow Jesus means to go out for Jesus, to go out with Jesus, to live for others in the name and in the spirit of Jesus. To follow Jesus means to bring others into the fellowship of Christ. Beautiful story about Andrew. Remember one of the disciples that Jesus called? He responded to Christ. The very first thing he did was say, "Hey, this is so good. So great. Means so much to me. I've got a brother back home that I want to have the same experience." And he went to get him. To be a follower of Jesus means to bring somebody else into the fellowship. To follow Jesus means to serve, to serve with concern and with compassion, the needs of other people, as someone said, the church's major task today, is not to make great mental demands on its Christians. But the real task today is to enlist their compassion. To follow Jesus means to be willing to suffer. Suffering is indeed a part of the way of Christ. It's a part of the way of discipleship for him. Suffering as a condition of discipleship, something that comes to true disciples, as same as it did to Jesus. So I hear these words, I say these words, I read these words, I realize these words. And then I say, I really don't suffer much because of my following Jesus. As a matter of fact, it's a pretty good status symbol and it gives me some pretty good prestige and rank. I do not suffer much, if any at all, because of my following Jesus. Perhaps my following is not near the kind of following that Jesus talked about and called for and lived out. So when I hear these words, "Follow me," I wonder, is the cost too high? The words come, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself." And I don't do much of that. And take up his cross? And I don't want to do that. And follow me? And I'm not willing to do that. I don't know about you, but now I understand why

Jesus began this saying with the words, "If anyone would come after me," why he began by saying, "If anyone." Why he said, "If." The cost, is it too high? Let us pray. Oh good and gracious Lord, teach us to serve thee as thou deservest. To give and not to count the cost. To fight and not to head the wounds. To toil and not to seek for rest. To labor and not to ask for any reward, save that, of knowing that we do thy will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (soft music) (music drowning singers) (soft music) (soft music continues) (women harmonizing) (singers indistinctly singing) (singers being drowned by music) (music drowning singers) ♪ Singing praises (indistinct) ♪ (singers singing indistinctly) ♪ Singing praises up to our king ♪ ♪ Sing praises, singing praises ♪ ♪ Singing praises ♪ ♪ Singing praises ♪ (singers being drowned by music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ (indistinct) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ Amen ♪ Oh Lord God, accept these gifts that we lift up to you as symbols. Symbols of a rededication of our material resources and our very lives to you and to your service. May the way we spend our time and make use of the resources given to us in the week ahead, be a continued offering to you. We pray in your son's name. Amen. (soft music) (music drowning singers) (music continues) Go now, and the spirit of the Lord to go with you. Preach good news to the poor. Proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. Set at liberty, those who are oppressed so that this may truly be a year that is acceptable to the Lord. Go now, and the peace of God, go with you. Amen. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (joyful music) (joyful music continues) (joyful music continues) (joyful music continues) (all clap)