

(choral music) (silence) (hushed coughing and footsteps)

- Good morning. I'd like to welcome you to Duke Chapel on this fourth Sunday of Easter. Our guest choir today is the University Chorale from UNC at Greensboro. We're grateful for them to providing the music in this service and for their very special contribution to our service of worship today. I'd like to call your attention to a couple of announcements in your bulletin. First, a new endowment has been established to honor Brenda Brodie, Duke's First Lady, and a long-term member of the congregation at Duke Chapel. The details of that endowment are listed in your bulletin. We'd also like to invite you to join in singing with the Duke Chapel summer choir. There are no auditions required and attendance is flexible. It's a wonderful opportunity for those of you who've wanted to sing but can't make the contribution for the ongoing commitment to be a part of our regular choir. So, we hope you will consider that this summer. Now, let us continue our worship together as we stand for the greeting. Christ is risen.

Congregation: The Lord is risen indeed.

Minister: Glory and honor, dominion and power be to God forever and ever.

Congregation: Christ is risen, amen. (organ plays) (all sing "Come Christians, Join To Sing") ♪ Come, Christians, join to sing, ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ ♪ Loud praise to Christ our King. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ ♪ Let all, with heart and voice ♪ ♪ Before his throne rejoice. ♪ ♪ Praise is his gracious choice. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ ♪ Come, lift your hearts on high. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ ♪ Let praises fill the sky. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ ♪ He is our guide and friend. ♪ ♪ To us he'll condescend. ♪ ♪ His love shall never end. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ (organ interlude) ♪ Praise yet the Lord again. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ ♪ Life shall not end the strain. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪ ♪ On heaven's blissful shore ♪ ♪ His goodness we'll adore, ♪ ♪ Singing forevermore. ♪ ♪ Alleluia! Amen! ♪

- Let us pray. Oh gracious Lord, you have formed us in our mother's womb to be Your children and to live worshipful lives. Please accept our songs and prayers, our preaching and our gifts as genuine praise and worship for You whom we adore. Transform us into worshipful people by what we do this hour. In the name of the blessed Trinity, amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together the prayer for illumination.

All: Oh living God, bring us forth from death to life so that, as the old scriptures are read and the word is proclaimed, we may be brought to a sure and living faith in your lordship, amen.

- This reading is taken from the second chapter of Acts, starting with its 42nd verse. "They devoted themselves "to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, "to the breaking of bread and the prayers. "Awe came upon everyone "because many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles. "All who believed were together "and had all things in common. "They would sell their possessions and goods "and distribute the

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- This reading is taken from the Gospel according to Saint John, the 10th chapter, starting with the 1st verse. "Very truly I tell you, "anyone who does not enter the sheep fold by the gate, "but climbs in by another way, "is a thief and a bandit. "The one who enters by the gate "is the shepherd of the sheep. "The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, "and the sheep hear his voice. "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. "When he has brought out all of his own, "he goes ahead of them, "and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. "They will not follow a stranger, "but they will run from him, "because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, "but they did not understand what he was saying to them. "So again, Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. "All who came before me are thieves and bandits. "But the sheep did not listen to them. "I am the gate. "Whoever enters by me will be saved "and will come in and go out "and will find pasture. "The Thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. "I came that they may have life, "and have it abundantly." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- "After Jesus' death and resurrection, "he appeared to the disciples and spent 40 days with them, "speaking about the kingdom of God, "promising they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. "Shortly after Jesus ascended into Heaven, "the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers, "about 120 in all, "touching each one with a tongue as of fire. "They were endowed with power "and the ability to speak unknown languages. "Those who saw them, Jews from every land, "heard them speaking about God's power and God's deeds, "each in their own language, and they were amazed. "Some wondered what it meant, "while others thought they must be drunk. "Peter, standing with the 11 apostles, "witnessed to the crowd that had gathered "about all they had experienced through Jesus. "He told them that Jesus "was the Messiah they had waited for, "who, though being put to death, "had risen again from the dead, "that they had seen the resurrected Lord "and received the gift of his power through the Holy Spirit. "And after hearing him that day, "about 3,000 people were saved, repenting of their sins, "and being baptized with water and the Spirit." 3,000 people saved. The body of believers grew, in one afternoon, from 120 to 3,120. An amazing accomplishment. Yet, in this age of televangelism, perhaps we've lost our ability to be amazed. After all, TV evangelists claim to save this many and more on a regular basis. Billy Graham revivals have been known to pack in over 100,000 people, so what is 3,000 compared to that? Besides, what does it mean to be saved? We've all known people who've had a mountaintop religious experience but soon lost their enthusiasm for religion. Contemporary religious life is plagued by momentary enthusiasm and superficiality. In fact, in contemporary parlance, enthusiastic, which literally means, "filled with God," is a virtual synonym for a short-term high that doesn't translate into long-term commitment. We've grown suspicious of people who get drunk every Friday and get saved every Sunday. We've grown jaded about religious experience. So when Luke says 3,000 people were saved, we aren't as impressed as earlier readers might have been. But lest we dwell on the mountaintop experience too long, Luke quickly moves us back to everyday life, to the, "So what? "What difference does it make that they were saved?" This is where our scripture text from Acts

begins today. Listen to Luke's answer to that ever-important question, "So what?" "They devoted themselves "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, "to the breaking of bread and the prayers." In one brief sentence, Luke lays out the basic outline of the practices of the early Christian church. "They devoted themselves "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, "to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Luke doesn't dwell upon the mystical experiences of these first believers, but immediately shifts to a description of the embodiment of the Pentecostal spirit in the community of believers. What difference did it make in how they lived? First of all, Luke tells us that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They immediately set about the task of learning what it means to be a believer in Jesus as the Christ. We may be certain that they heard many details about Jesus' life and teachings, his death and resurrection, his reappearances to the apostles, and his instruction to those who were eyewitnesses. We may be certain that they studied the Hebrew scriptures to understand them anew in the light of the coming of the Messiah. They learned from the apostles what it meant to be a believer in Jesus Christ, what it meant to live as a Christian in the world. You and I don't have the benefit of oral, direct, firsthand conversation with those who were witnesses to Christ, but we have the next best thing. We are inheritors of the written record of the life and teachings of Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets before them. One of the most important practices for us, as the Church, and especially for those new in the faith, is to devote ourselves to the study of the apostles' teaching, and the living word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments. When we study the word, we open ourselves to God's living presence among us. Recently, a friend of mine had a baby about three and a half months early. She told me one night that she was at the end of her strength, totally consumed by anxiety and fear. She prayed for courage and strength, and for some sign from God that would give her peace and help her accept whatever was to come. She told me she felt compelled to open her Bible. She said, "You know, I really don't believe "in that kind of mystical thing, "but when I opened my Bible, "the first thing I saw was "that verse from Philippians that said, "'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' "And I knew it was gonna be okay, "that I could handle whatever would happen." Whenever we devote ourselves to learn from the scriptures, we open ourselves to receive whatever it is that God would give us, whether a word of comfort, a call to repentance, the assurance of forgiveness, a challenge to greater faithfulness, a nudge toward a decision. God meets us in the scriptures at the point of our need, comforting us, moving us, shaping us as beloved children, as disciples of Christ. It is important for us to study the scriptures on our own, that God might speak to each one of us, but it is also important that we devote ourselves to the scriptures together, as a community of faith, for it is the collective memories and traditions that come to us through scripture which constitute and shape us as a community of faith. Through scripture we're held accountable to a particular belief and a particular behavior, and without it we are at risk of losing our identity as the body of Christ in the world. Like the early believers, we study scripture to learn what it means to be the Church, and thus we are united through scripture with those first Christians who devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Another manifestation of the Pentecost spirit in that early Church was the fellowship they shared. Luke goes on, in our text, to describe that, "All who believed were together "and had all things in common. "They would sell their possessions and goods "and distribute the proceeds to all who had need." The fellowship Luke described involved a complete transformation of their social and material arrangements. If you'll remember, early in the story, Luke told us that the crowd gathered at the Pentecost gathering, when the 3,000 were saved, contained people from every nation on Earth. To unify so diverse an assembly of people with a common faith and a common commitment was truly amazing. The recent "60 Minutes" report on race relations at Duke, though one-sided, admittedly, did highlight the

problems we've had in achieving multi-cultural understanding even in our enlightened age. We know how difficult it can be to find common ground among diverse people. But the early Christian community didn't settle for a few areas of common ground. They had all things in common, giving to any as they had need. This radical understanding of social and material fellowship is particularly challenging for us, since we live in a world that values individualism and material accumulation above all else. We cling to our separateness and our possessions so tightly for fear that if we let them go, we will be in some way diminished. But something dramatic happened to these early believers, something that led them beyond the conventional relationships based on the "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" philosophy, to a radical fellowship of sacrificial giving. Because they experienced the awesome gift of Christ self-giving, they were empowered to be self-giving to one another. We too are called to be a fellowship of radical self-giving people. Too often we participate in worship as strangers, having no concern for one another, rather than as brothers and sisters unified in Christ. Providing opportunities for radical fellowship is a particular challenge for us at Duke Chapel because this is such a transient community. Worship in Duke Chapel is truly a blessed experience, but it's not a substitute for intimate Christian fellowship. That's the reason we encourage those of you who consider the chapel your primary place of worship to affiliate with the congregation here, to join the choir, the mission committee, the altar guild, the young adult fellowship, a Bible study, to usher. It's the reason that we encourage the young adults, the students who come to chapel to worship here, to also be a part of religious life groups. All of us need to be members of a close, intimate Christian fellowship where we are cared for and challenged to grow as people of faith, where we can share in one another's pain and joy, need and resources. With our culture's emphasis on individualism, we're at great risk of privatizing faith, but the Holy Spirit was not given to individuals alone. It was poured out on the gathered community of believers who were then led into an even closer, more intimate, radical fellowship as the early Christian Church. Whenever we are given a spiritual gift, it is always to call us into greater service to one another. And I would argue that we cannot be the Church alone, and that we cannot be Christians alone, for to be Christian is to be called into sacrificial living, and that allows must be embodied in community. So like the early Church, we are called to share in radical Christian fellowship. One of the ways they strengthened their fellowship was in the breaking of bread. Now, Luke doesn't tell us whether they understood this as a sacramental act or not, but he does say they broke bread at home and they ate their food with glad and generous hearts. Something happens when you break bread with another person, even a stranger. Barriers are lowered and defenses are dropped. You leave with a greater sense of familiarity and acceptance. Think about the people you choose to break bread with. Who do you invite into your home to share a meal with you? Usually the people we dine with are those we feel most comfortable with, those with whom we can be ourselves. In breaking bread together, the first believers became brothers and sisters in Christ. Racial, social, economic, and gender barriers were overcome, and a sense of equality and mutual love were established. At a soup kitchen in Washington, D.C., some Duke students shared a meal with several homeless men and women over Spring break. After the meal, they commented, "You know, they're not that different from us." And in Honduras, students shared many meals with the villagers while they served there over their Spring break, and they were amazed at how festive and joyous a meal of beans and tortillas could be. Those communities taught them something about what it means to be in fellowship. Christ calls us to break bread with one another, remembering that as he was broken for us, so he also calls us to be broken for one another. He calls us to a shared table fellowship, where all feast with glad hearts at the banquet of God's love. The last characteristic that Luke said was embodied in the early Christian community was a devotion to prayer. He

goes on to say that they spent much time together in the temple, and we can assume that even with the newness of the Christian experience, they continued to honor the Jewish traditions, they continued to be devout Jewish people. But we can also assume that they prayed together as a community of believers in Christ, and that their fellowship was strengthened through the experience of prayer. Like scripture, fellowship, and breaking bread, prayer is essential to an embodied Christian faith. In prayer, the community of faith is linked through the Holy Spirit with Christ and with one another. It is a mystical reality that whenever two or three are gathered in Christ's name, Christ is also there in the midst of them. All of us should pray alone to strengthen our relationship with Christ, but there is special power, special strength, whenever we join our hearts, our wills, and our voices in prayer with other common believers. First of all, through prayer God works within us, to change us, to move us to greater service and love, to unify us. Through prayer, we also unite our wills and our hopes as we petition to God for a common purpose, for peace in the community, for the healing of one of our members. And through prayer, our hearts become one with Christ's heart, as we share one another's burdens and joys. I have two very dear friends who had different outcomes from prayer. Anne's sister was told by her doctors that she had incurable cancer, but Anne's church prayed for her sister's recovery, and she's now in her fifth year of being cancer-free. Coincidence or miracle? I believe it was an answer to prayer. My other friend, Mary, also had cancer. Her cancer would have been curable had it been caught and properly diagnosed when it showed up three years previously on her mammogram. But because it was not caught and not diagnosed, the cancer had spread. Mary's church also prayed for her recovery, but Mary died a few months ago. But instead of dying with anger and bitterness, as was her right, she died with great peace, even joy. Was that unrealistic or grace? I believe it was an answer to prayer. We don't know why some prayers are answered as we want and others are not, but we do know that prayer changes things, mainly us. The community of faith is sustained through prayer, and it is one of the Spirit's abiding gifts to us. It is a gift we should partake of often. 3,000 people were saved. So what difference did it make? They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers, with glad and generous hearts, praising God, and every day, others were added to their numbers. They embodied the Pentecost spirit, and they became the Church, the visible body of Christ in the world. Occasionally we too are privileged to share one of those mountaintop religious experiences when we know without a doubt that we've been touched by the Spirit of God, but whether or not we've had a Pentecost experience, Luke reminds us that the embodied Spirit calls us into the community of faith, where our life as Christian brothers and sisters is nurtured and sustained. Like the early Church, let us devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and scripture, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers, for these are the things that are necessary for us, as they were for them, to become the faithful, embodied Church of Christ in the world. Let us devote ourselves to all these things with glad and generous hearts, praising God, knowing God is with us. Thanks be to God. (organ plays) (all sing "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath) ♪ I'll praise my Maker while I've breath; ♪ ♪ And when my voice is lost in death, ♪ ♪ Praise shall employ my nobler powers. ♪ ♪ My days of praise shall ne'er be past, ♪ ♪ While life, and thought, and being last, ♪ ♪ Or immortality endures. ♪ ♪ Happy are they whose hopes rely ♪ ♪ On Israel's God, who made the sky ♪ ♪ And earth and seas, with all their train; ♪ ♪ Whose truth for ever stands secure, ♪ ♪ Who saves th'oppressed and feeds the poor, ♪ ♪ For none shall find God's promise vain. ♪ ♪ The Lord pours eyesight on the blind; ♪ ♪ The Lord supports the fainting mind ♪ ♪ And sends the laboring conscience peace. ♪ ♪ God helps the stranger in distress, ♪ ♪ The widow and the fatherless, ♪ ♪ And grants the prisoner sweet release. ♪ ♪ I'll praise my God who lends me breath; ♪ ♪ And when my voice is lost in death, ♪ ♪ Praise shall

employ my nobler powers. ♪ ♪ My days of praise shall ne'er be past, ♪ ♪ While life, and thought, and being last, ♪ ♪ Or immortality endures. ♪

Minister: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Oh, gracious God, we have not loved you with our whole heart, soul, mind or strength. We have not loved our neighbors or our enemies. We have not loved our friends or family with your love. We have not loved ourselves. Forgive us and transform us. Breathe on us your peace and heal us from our sin. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Jesus, we come here to seek your face, to hear your voice speak good news to us, to come near enough to you that we can touch your side, to feel the wounds of your hands and feet. We have come here to feast on you, to experience your sustaining grace as we eat the bread and drink the wine which are you. We have come to wash your feet with precious oil and dry them with our hair, to carry your cross, to find a home for you, to offer you our bread to eat, to welcome you at our table. We have come here to this sanctuary to be friends with you again. Oh, Lord, befriend us. Lord, in your mercy--

- [Minister And Congregation] Hear our prayer.

- We pray for all our government leaders, for the Clintons and Gores, for all those in Washington and in our state House. Keep them true to their professed faith, that they would lead us in ways of compassion and self-sacrifice, lead us in the ways of your peace. Draw all those in power to the poor, to the widows and orphans, to those in prison, to those who, this very hour, are searching for food and shelter. Teach each one in power of their own poverty, sin, and need for you. Give each one in authority over us the desire to be humble disciples of Christ. Lord, in your mercy--

- [Minister And Congregation] Hear our prayer.

- We pray for all those seniors and graduate students leaving Duke this month. Remind them of their high calling to live as saints and those who imitate Christ. Draw them to places of greatest need, where they can discover you on the faces of the poor, where they can help build your kingdom with hope and healing, light, truth, beauty, and the gospel of your love. Draw them into places of genuine fellowship and worship. Draw them into deep intimacy with you and the saints who have gone before us. Enable them to sell their possessions and give to anyone who has need. Oh, Holy Spirit, you have gifted each one of us for the building of your Church. Give us vocations which spring from our spiritual gifts. We pray for all the parents of seniors, that they could set their children free to follow you, trusting you and the Church with their sons and daughters. I pray for all those who teach here at Duke and everywhere, that you would keep them true to their baptism, joining their students in this precious pilgrimage of faith, and modeling for their students lives of humbles service, genuine fellowship and love, radical devotion to your ways. Keep their teaching in service to the church. Lord, in your mercy--

- [Minister And Congregation] Hear our prayer.

Minister: Draw us all to Bosnia and Somalia, to the West Bank and North Ireland, to Lumberton and Honduras, Miami and Washington, to the neighborhoods of Durham where there is the greatest violence and hunger, to the apartments filled with abuse or illness, so we might be your resurrected body in the world, and those who suffer might draw us to your cross. Lord, in your mercy--

- [Minister And Congregation] Hear our prayer.

- We always pray in hope and faith, and we pray this prayer in the name of the blessed Trinity, World without end, amen. God has enabled us to live this abundant life as thankful people. From our abundance and from our poverty, let us offer the Lord our gifts. (organ plays and choir sings) (organ plays) (all sing)

- Oh Lord, we give you thanks for the privilege of loving you and serving you. Guide us in the use of these gifts, that we might build your kingdom with faith and compassion. For everything in our lives which is true and good and which reminds us of you, we give you thanks. Make of us thankful people, with the prayer your Son taught us always on our lips, as we say--

- [Minister And Congregation] 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 and the power and the glory forever, amen.

Minister: Please remain standing and let us sing together our closing hymn, "Christ Is Made The Sure Foundation." (organ plays) (all sing "Christ Is Made The Sure Foundation") ♪ Christ is made the sure foundation, ♪ ♪ Christ the head and cornerstone, ♪ ♪ Chosen of the Lord and precious, ♪ ♪ Binding all the church in one. ♪ ♪ Holy Zion's help forever, ♪ ♪ And her confidence alone. ♪ ♪ To this temple, where we call thee, ♪ ♪ Come, O Lord of Hosts, today. ♪ ♪ With thy faithful loving-kindness ♪ ♪ Hear thy people as they pray, ♪ ♪ And thy fullest benediction ♪ ♪ Shed within its walls alway. ♪ ♪ Here vouchsafe to all thy servants ♪ ♪ What they ask of thee to gain, ♪ ♪ What they gain from thee forever ♪ ♪ With the blessed to retain, ♪ ♪ And hereafter in thy glory ♪ ♪ Evermore with thee to reign. ♪ ♪ Laud and honor to the Father, ♪ ♪ Laud and honor to the Son, ♪ ♪ Laud and honor to the Spirit, ♪ ♪ Ever three and ever one; ♪ ♪ One in might ♪