

("Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow) ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise Him all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts ♪ ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- We give thee but thine own, whate'er the gift may be. All that we have is thine alone. A trust, O Lord, from thee. Amen. (reverent music)

- Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Many of us have been in London. While there, some of us have visited Westminster Abbey, the parish church of the British empire. Those of us who have not visited Westminster Abbey, know it through television. The scene of the coronation, the mausoleum of Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth, the place of memory of Milton and Handel and Darwin and Gladstone. The grave of the unknown soldier. It is an unforgettable spot. Yet one visitor declined to be overly impressed with the deceased celebrities in this all-British hall of fame. She finally blurted out to the guide, "Young man. All this is very interesting, but what I want to know is has anyone been saved here recently?" Has anyone been saved here recently? It's a valid question to ask in a church. And Westminster Abbey is a church. The church's business is in part salvation. You've all heard that before, but you're probably muttering to yourselves, "Okay, but what is salvation?" Etymologically the word is derived from the Latin adjective *salvus*, which means well. That in turn points to the noun *salus*, which means health. And so the lady's question to the astonished guide may be paraphrased, has anybody been put back into good condition here recently? Has anyone discovered what it means to be healthy here recently? It's a shocking question to hear, especially if all one wanted to see in Westminster Abbey was the coronation chair, which has as its seat the Stone of Scone, stolen by the English long ago from Scotland. But the lady asked a haunting question and we'd better have a look at it together. Now, one of the best ways to understand what health is may be to consider the opposite: disease, sickness. Moreover, it's wise to remember that sickness is often a psychosomatic problem, an illness of the body and soul thought of as one entity with no hyphen between psycho and somatic. This sickness of man, which disturbs him in soul and body, may reveal itself in any or all of the three manifestations. There is first a sense of helplessness, of impotence. This is more than the weakness of a child, which can be counteracted by a confident dependence on his parents. It is the hopeless helplessness of the adult who may well desire to return to the safety of the womb. It may express itself in the blurted-out sincerity of, "I wish I had never been born." May be caused by fear of that which is new and strange and unexpected or by an overwhelming sense of the uselessness of one's toil. One who feels hopelessly helpless is sick, psychically and maybe psychosomatically. The human sickness may secondly reveal itself in a purposelessness, an uncertainty about where to turn, where to go. Life makes no sense. Now you're recalling the words which Shakespeare put into the mouth of Macbeth: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Life signifies nothing and death makes even less sense. You remember of the epitaph on the grave of a child. Child, age three weeks. Three weeks in

Cheltenham Churchyard. "It was so soon that I am done for, I wonder what I was begun for." No wonder there was wonder. We wonder regularly in the sense of puzzlement, bewilderment, perplexity. We are nonplussed, dumbfounded, we are tired of living and scared of dying, like Hamlet. We really don't know where we're going, but we're on our way. We think enough along this line, we become sick, psychosomatically. Helplessness, purposelessness. There's a third manifestation of man's sickness: guilt. Now this is not the same as wickedness or perversity though it's connected with them. It is the realization that one may be justly charged, justly charged with responsibility for his improper conduct. He knows he is guilty, even if no one else does. He may even be guilty before God. It is bad enough to be an embarrassed criminal standing before a judge or a dean. It's worse to be a sensible sinner standing with head bowed in the presence of God. One of the Psalmists caught that when he wrote, "But I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight. So that thou art justified in thy sentencing and blameless in thy judgment. Paul went even deeper into the guilt sickness, even deeper than the Psalmist. "For of the good that would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." And one can almost hear the man yelling, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Now this has to be a really sick, smitten with guilt, conscience. All right, there is the sickness in three manifestations. But our topic is salvation. Health. Is there a remedy? Is there a doctor in the house? The Christian answer is yes. Jesus the Christ is a physician sent by God. Listen to him. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous," that is, those who out in good condition, "but sinners." That is the spiritually sick, the hopeless, the purposeless, the guilty. Do you recall the meaning of the name Jesus? It is savior. That is he who brings salvation, help. Paul Tillich translates it precisely the healer. Now Jesus' technique of healing was to refer his patients to God, to a God who wished men well, to a God who wanted people to be in good condition. That is, in right relations with themselves and with their fellows. To a God who had sent Jesus to cure the sick. Yes, the psychosomatically sick. To the helpless, Jesus brought the good news that they should rely on God as a child relies on his parents. You remember what he said to his disciples who were safeguarding him against a stampede of children? "Let the children come to me. Don't hinder them, for such belongs the Kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter therein." Now, this is not a plea for the Christian to be a spiritual Dennis the Menace or a pious sweetie pie, or even a member of some ecclesiastical Peanuts youth fellowship. It asks that we recognize, accept and rely upon our utter dependence on God who created us, sustains us and who will put us back into good condition if we will but accept the dependent relation of a child to a father. Now, this may seem to some of you what an Englishman has called the acceptance of bleeding charity. Well, it is just that. Well, you've got to spell bleeding charity a capital B and a capital C. It is the acceptance of bleeding charity. And it's one way to cure helplessness. To the purposeless, Jesus gave direction. Love God, love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. Now this offers a spiritual polestar by which to steer. It means that even here on Earth, we shall so far as in us lies live the life of the Kingdom of God. And because we act in goodwill, giving cups of cold water to the thirsty, or building up a pipeline of pure water for a droughty community, we shall one day walk right through the gates of the new Jerusalem. Purposelessness will be supplanted by a goal, a goal which will be reached, hereafter if not here. And to the guilty, Jesus brought good news. The gospel of forgiveness for the guilt of sin and deliverance from the power of sin. This was discovered by folk like the woman at the well and Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter. And after his death and resurrection, this double victory over sin, forgiveness and deliverance, was the experience of a host whom no man can number, but some of whom

you and I can name in our hearts right now. Jesus not only forgave sin while on Earth, His spirit still takes away the sin of the world. The guilty are not merely acquitted, they are absolved. Now this is the message of the New Testament. God, of His own free will, through Jesus Christ, brought and brings the salvation which is health to the helpless, the purposeless, the guilty. He does it not because we are worthy, we know we're not, but because He can't help it. You see, His nature is love. And throughout the centuries, the church has sought not only to teach this fact, but to explain it. And right here, the trouble begins, because the explanations differ. The advocates squabble among themselves and the divisions of Christendom perpetuate the difference. For example, the epistle to the Hebrews pictures the Christ in Jewish terms, an eternal high priest who carries himself daily into the celestial holies of holy to atone for the sins of the world. But we are not Jews. Anselm tackles the problem like a Roman lawyer. The problem of how the eternal law of justice can be satisfied in a scheme of salvation, which accentuates divine forgiveness. How can you tie together justice and forgiveness? But we are not Romans. Abelard works out a model theory of man's atonement with God based on the fact that the revelation of God's love in Jesus stirs man's heart to a repentance, which makes him whole, healthy again. But if you read Abelard, you'll have difficulty grasping the whole of it. And the classic theory concentrates on the resurrection, where Jesus broke the power of death, therefore He broke the power of sin because the wages of sin are death, Therefore He broke the power of Satan, and He enables man to share in the victory. And this annoys those of us who would make the cross central in God's saving act. But if we ask the proponents of these four theories if there were any basic agreement among them, they might well answer, if they'd calm down enough, "Yes." The forgiveness, the redemption, the salvation, the renewed health of man is primarily, solely due to God and to His agent, Jesus Christ. And if we, surprised at their unanimity, asked another question, "Can you prove it?" They might well answer, "Yes." Go and talk with someone who has experienced the fact of salvation, renewed health. Well, let's try it. Saint Paul, what was your problem? Why did you become a Christian? I became a Christian because Judaism didn't work for me. I kept the law, how I kept it. But it never gave me the confidence it was supposed to give that I was right with God. Even persecuting the Christians, I had a feeling of hopeless helplessness. And then I discovered that one is right with God if he wants to be. Know why? Because God wants it. That's what He was telling us in Jesus Christ. You just accept that, and you're well again, the bottom drops out of your helplessness. You remember what I wrote to the Romans? "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." It worked. Now let's ask someone else. What about purposelessness? A British officer, a confessed Christian, in the First World War, has told us how he steadied a battalion before it went over the top against the German lines. He just said three things. "If we live, it's victory. If we're wounded, it's blighted, that's home. If we are killed, it's the resurrection." Oh, they couldn't lose on that faith. Three goals. All good. And the Christian faith, which removes purposelessness within the third. "If we are killed, it's the resurrection." The troops weren't safe, no. But they could be saved. What about guilt? Well, here I'd like to talk with Zacchaeus. He was a sinner. In fact, he was an official sinner. Anyone who collected taxes was automatically a sinner. Maybe that's a sound idea, I don't know. He was a sinner, an official sinner, because though a Jew he collected Roman taxes from his fellow Jews. He therefore knew ostracism. He probably also knew guilt. His response to Jesus' visit to his home suggests that he was well aware of the economic shenanigans through which a tax collector lined his own pockets. Jesus talked with him. And what a response Zacchaeus made. "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I'll restore it fourfold." 400%. Now, when you touch a man's pocket like that, you've touched his heart. And

Jesus gave him His blessing. "Today, salvation," that is, health, "has come to this house." Freed from guilt, delivered from the sin which so easily beset him, found of God, Zacchaeus began to act at once in Godlike fashion. His past had been redeemed, his present transformed, and his future redirected. Now it is known that in each of these three cases, salvation began here, on Earth. It'll have to wait for its completion until after death, but this Earth is the site of God's saving work and of men's restoration to health. Jesus was and is God's physician. Has anyone been saved here recently? In Duke Chapel? The answer is with us, in person. There are alumni who found health here when they were undergraduates, and worship with us today on homecoming Sunday. It's not surprising to find them. Our legend of Zacchaeus tells us why they are here with us. Zacchaeus used to disappear from the bustle of the marketplace now and again. One day an inquisitive person followed him and saw him stop at a certain tree and touch it almost with a caress. When he was asked why he did it, Zacchaeus answered, "It was from this tree that I first saw my Lord. And when I get all hot and bothered and worried, I come out here and I stand beside it and I meet Him again." And he, and some of our alumni, and many of us can add, "And we are well again." This is one aspect of the gospel of salvation. Let us pray. Almighty and eternal God, thou healer of men, we do give thee humble and hearty thanks for thy goodness to thy creatures in curing our helplessness in giving direction to our lives and in forgiving and delivering us from the guilt and power of sin, through the life, death and resurrection of thy son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And may the blessing of the Lord come upon you abundantly. May it keep you strong and tranquil in the truth of His promises this day and forever more. (reverent music)