

(organ music)

- Good morning and welcome to this service of worship. Our preacher for today is Reverend Dr. Clyde Fant, Dean of the Chapel at Stetson University. Dr. Fant is one of America's great preachers and also a distinguished writer about preaching and teacher of preaching, and we welcome him to the chapel this morning. He comes to us as the Clyde and Leveseth Foils guest distinguished preacher. This evening at 5:00, our assistant chapel organist, Monica Umstaedt Rossman, have a recital here in the chapel. We enjoy her music each Sunday and everyone is invited to the recital at 5:00 p.m. And at 8:15, The Eye of the Needle, a play being produced by the chapel will be performed. Admission is free. It is in York Chapel of the Divinity School and you're invited to that. It is a play about the life of St. Francis of Assisi. We also remind those of you who are Sunday worshippers of other worship opportunities through the week in the chapel.

Communion or the Lord's Supper is celebrated every Sunday after the service in Memorial Chapel as well as a noon prayer service each weekday in Memorial Chapel, and we have begun this year a choral vespers service at 5:15 on Thursdays in Memorial Chapel. And now let us continue our worship. ♪ Blessed be the God and Father ♪ ♪ Of our Lord Jesus Christ ♪ ♪ Which according to his abundant mercy ♪ ♪ Hath begotten us again ♪ ♪ Unto a lively hope by the resurrection ♪ ♪ Of Jesus Christ from the dead ♪ (organ music) (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Almighty God, be near to us in this time of worship and praise, that we may be lead to exchange whatever worldly cares or burdens which we have brought to this place of worship, for the good and gentle yoke of your will for our lives and thus be given the peace which pass with all understanding. In thy name we pray. Amen. Seated.

- Let us pray.

- Open our hearts

- Open our hearts and minds, oh God.

- And minds, oh God.

- By the power of your

- By the power of your Holy Spirit so that the word

- Holy Spirit so that the word is read and proclaimed,

- is read and proclaimed, we might hear with joy

- we might hear with joy what you say to us this day.

- What you say to us this day. Amen.

- Amen. The first lesson is taken from Acts. But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the people. Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and to the elders about this question. So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Sumeria, reporting the conversion of the gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the people. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, and the apostles, and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them, but some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessarily "to circumcise them and to charge them "to keep the law of Moses." The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Paul rose and said to them, "Brothers and sisters, you know "that in the early days, God made choice among you, "that by my mouth, the gentiles should hear the word "of the gospel and believe, and God who knows the heart "were witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit "just as he did to us, and he made no distinction "between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. "Now therefore, why do you make trial of God "by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples "which neither our ancestors nor we "have been able to bear, but we believe that we shall "be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus "just as they will." This ends the reading of the first lesson.

- Let us stand for the responsive reading of the psalm. Blessed are those whose way is blameless.

Congregation: Who walk according to the law of the Lord.

- Blessed are those who keep his testimonies.

Congregation: And seek him with all their might.

- Who also do no wrong.

Congregation: But follow his ways.

- Thou has commanded they're precepts to be kept diligently.

Congregation: Oh, that my ways are steadfast in obeying my sentence.

- Then I shall not be put to shame.

- When I consider all your commands.

- I will praise thee with an upright heart.

- As I learn your righteous laws.

- I will observe thy statutes.

Congregation: Forsake me not.

Pastor: How can a young man keep his way pure?

Congregation: By keeping it according to thy word.

Pastor: With all my heart I have seek thee.

Congregation: Do not let me wander from thy commandments.

- I have laid up thy word in my heart.

- That I may not sin against you.

- Blessed are thou, O Lord.

- Teach me your statutes.

- With my lips I declare all the ordinances of thy mouth.

- I have rejoiced of all your testimony.

- I will meditate on thy precepts.

Congregation: I will regard thy ways.

- I will delight in thy statutes.

Congregation: I will not forget thy word. (organ music) (choral music)

- The second lesson is taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. But I, brothers and sisters, could not address you as spiritual beings, but as men and women of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk,

not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even yet, you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving like ordinary people? For when one says I belong to Paul and another, I belong to Apollos, are you not merely human beings? When then, what this is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants whom through you believed as the Lord assigned to each. I plant it, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth, so neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal and each shall receive the wages according to his label, for we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. This ends the reading of the Second Lesson. (organ music) ♪ We wait for thy longing of thy blissful God ♪ ♪ In the midst of thy temple ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (organ music) ♪ Oh God, according to thy name ♪ ♪ So as I praise unto the world ♪ ♪ Thy hand is full of righteousness ♪ ♪ O God, the word of Christ ♪ (choral music) ♪ We wait for thy loving kindness, O God ♪ ♪ In the midst of thy temple ♪ ♪ O send us now prosperity ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- The Gospel lesson is taken from Matthew. Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them, for truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men and women so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven, for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said in ancient times you shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his neighbor shall be liable for judgment. Whoever insults his neighbor shall be liable to the council, and whoever says you fool shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that, that your neighbor has something against you. Leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your neighbor, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends guilty with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny. This ends the reading of the Gospel.

- It was a hot August evening in Louisiana, or do I repeat myself? We had just moved to a new neighborhood and I was to begin school that fall. I didn't know anybody and I didn't want to go outside and play with the other kids. My mother said, "Now son, you go on outside. "Those are nice boys and girls. "They like you." I said, "No, they do not like me." She said, "You don't know, you haven't met them." I said, "I know they don't like me." She said, "Well now, you just go on outside "and play with them," and she pushed me out the screen door and latched it behind me. (congregation laughs) I stood there frozen with fear in a new neighborhood where I didn't know anybody and where I dressed funny and where they played games I didn't understand. They ran through the night, chasing the fireflies and calling out some strange, mysterious word, Ticonderoga! I thought, what is that? Ticondero, Ticondero, Ticonder, Ticonderoga! It was wonderful. I had no earthly idea what it meant, and as some of them ran past me, one of them finally grabbed me by the arm. I thought I was being attacked and tried to get in the screen door, only to discover he just wanted me to come and run with the rest of them through the fading Louisiana light. And after a while as I ran and heard the wonderful, mysterious word, I finally got up my courage and began to call it out

myself. First, timidly. Ticonderoga, and it felt so good. Ticonderoga! They smiled and looked at me and said, "Ticonderoga!" And I turned to the boy running next to me and I said, "What does it mean?" He says, "You don't know?" Ticonderoga! Well, it was that fall when I got in school and opened up the pencil box of yellow pencils and looked at them, and there stamped on the side was the mysterious word, Ticonderoga. None of them had the faintest idea what it meant, and I've seen some of them recently and they still don't have the faintest idea what it meant. (congregation laughing) But it didn't really matter, you see? It was their world, it was their password, and things haven't really changed very much, have they? We still have our clubs, our friends, our neighborhoods, our passwords. My grandmother used to like to say adults are only children with long arms and legs, and I think she was right. We still find so many ways to separate ourselves from one another, and the things that separate us are the most painful things in life, age, gender, money, power, race, environment. And the funny thing is, if life doesn't put those things on us, we'll put them on ourselves. We'll find new ways to keep on separating ourselves like a milk separator ever is skimming the cream off. You go to the store now, you can buy milk, but that's too simple. You can buy 2% milk, you can buy 1% milk, or you can buy, God help us, skim milk. And so we create fraternities and sororities of all kinds all of our lives and we stand about like cattle to be examined, mooing docilely, balancing our cups and trying to smile, but not too much, trying to look pleasant but not too pleasant, trying to look in when we feel so terribly out. It's not much fun. Oh, it's a lot of fun if you're in. Then you get to make the rules, then you can decide who can get along and who could never get along. It was on the school ground in that first school where a boy I admired but who never talked to me, after all, I was short and he was tall, I was little. He was big, he was athletic, I was klutzy. I mean, why should he talk to me? Even I understood it. Well, one day as we began some softball game, he came up and draped a long arm over my shoulder and bent his head down toward my ear. I tell you, if one of the archangels from heaven suddenly came and embraced me with wings, I wouldn't have felt more ecstatic. And he got a lewd leer on his face and I knew this was going to be good. He looked about for a moment to be sure that no one could hear and that everyone could hear, and then he whispered in my ear as he pointed over toward Harvey Grant, the only Jewish boy in our class. "I never knew a Jew that could play baseball, did you?" Well actually, I had not given it any thought that Harvey Grant was Jewish or that anybody was Jewish or what, but the idea that Pete was talking to me was more than I could stand and I laughed and put on my face the same little wicked leer and I said, "No, I never saw one either." And just that time, I saw Harvey Grant's eyes and he had heard and more than that, he had felt, and his eyes went deep and dark in despair and I felt stabbed with a shame that unfortunately, I have felt a number of times since when I tried to be in and enjoyed somebody else being out. That's the way it is, those are the rules. I mean, what am I going to do about it? If you're not pretty enough, smart enough, that's in quotation marks, trendy enough, tough enough, I'm sorry, you're not gonna make it. For nearly 10 years, I pastored in north Dallas in a little suburb called Richardson that grew into a great big suburb. At one time, Texas Instruments, which at that time, was headquartered in, as it still is, and almost exclusively located in Richardson, employed 45,000 people inside the city limits of Richardson, and many of them were members of my church. I never preached to so many computer people in my life. It was like being chaplain to a math club. (congregation laughing) But that's another story. They almost never talked about TI, at least not really talked about TI, but one evening at somebody's house, we were all sitting around on the floor. One guy broke. I mean, he cracked, and he began to pour out a lot of things, and one of the things was about the abuse seminar. They have a better name for it than that that they conduct once a year when their management people are taken in and they browbeat one another. It must be a lot of fun if you're into that sort of thing, but it also caused a lot of

pain, but it did what they needed. You see, it toughened them up and it separated the weak from the strong. That's what happened in our Scripture this morning. The Scripture tells us that God, nobody else, had opened up a door for the gentiles, the outsiders, the ones who could come to see God at a distance from the court of the gentiles, but no closer, for the wall of partition that separated the court of the gentiles from the inner courtyards read, any gentile who passes beyond this spot will have no one but himself to thank for his own ensuing death. That's plain enough. God however, in the irrational way that God usually acts had opened up a door for the outsiders to come in. The church had a hard time about that. Peter had a real hard time about it. He had a terrible vision of the sailcloth coming down with nasty, creeping, crawling things on it and he heard a voice from heaven saying, we always make it a bass voice. "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." Peter said, "Not me Lord, I'm Orthodox. "I mean, I'm not going to violate God's law!" So, we're not surprised when certain of the sect of the Pharisees who had to leave object. Ah, ah, ah, ah they say. You must not let these people simply come directly in. If they come in at all, they'll come in the same way we got in. They'll come in through our customs, they'll come in through our traditions, they will come in through our law. Well, that was the problem. You see, it had become their law. Ah well, we say, we understand that. I mean, we're Pharisees, that's what you expect. Pharisees are legalistic! But perhaps we are just a little more than biased about that. The fact is, the Pharisees were simply trying to protect God. They were trying to take care of this beautiful law that was good, that was given to them by God as a kind of escort that would help them, so they said we'll just take care of this again for God. We'll just make sure that nothing bad happens for God, and that's what we go on doing. I mean, we're not bad people. We don't really want to hurt the Harvey Grants of the world or anybody else, we just want to make things right. We want to take care of things for our children and our neighborhoods, and our business, and our nation. And so we, like the Pharisees, plant a hedge about the law. You see, they not only had God's law, they had their oral law and tradition, and it was designed so that if you never broke the oral law and tradition, you couldn't get through the hedge to break God's law. That was very important. And we keep on creating those kinds of oral traditions. you have to do it this way, you have to say it this way, you must use this inflection. Depending on the part of the country you're in, it may be oh, oh, I tell you, and that's preaching. Or another place is, you hear this little bit of goat bleat. It's a kind of pious bleat. Oh, brothers and sisters, this is the word of God. Or it may be in other tones where we say Holy Spirit (audience laughs) with a kind of hypo nasality, as if one had extreme nasal blockage, but this is spiritual. You can come in all right if you come in our door. What's God doing knocking holes in our walls? Doesn't he know that's how sin got in the first time? Those torn lives! Keep out those. Well, at least the gods of the foreign-wise. The foreigners, that's our problem. Shucks, those of us who lived on Carolton Street knew it was those guys over on Leo Drive that were the bad guys. That's how we keep things straight. The Bible said of the Proselytes, they took up the yoke of the kingdom. Yes, and Jesus said in Matthew 23:4 about these Pharisees, "You pile up heavy burdens "grievous to be borne, but you don't lift a little "finger to lighten any of them." And then a strange thing. He doesn't say run around yoke-less, head off in any direction, it doesn't matter. Who cares? I don't, I'm granddaddy God and I don't care. Run in any direction you please, no yoke, no direction, no responsibility. No, no, he said, "Take my yoke upon you, it fits well. "My yoke is light "because my yoke links us up." The things we do to separate people are the most painful things in the world and the things that God does to unite people are the most healing things in the world. Sometimes when you hear Simon in the Bible, he's so much like us, we get embarrassed for ourselves, and at other times when we hear him, we want to cheer and say that's it! And when he said in Acts 15:11, "But we believe that through the grace "of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, "even as they,

we want to cheer," that's it, that's right. That's how we'll get in and that's how they get in. The yoke no one can bear is the awful pressure of our rules, our requirements, our inflections. We cannot bear the awful pressure of correctness because even if you know the password, they can always change it on you and they will, the right width of tie, the right amount of indifference or enthusiasm, whatever. We can always change it and we do. When the Scripture says God the same yesterday, today, and forever, the Scriptures are not describing some monolithic God that is inflexible, but rather, the one who is consistently open to us. I remember in Sunday school, hearing the story of the cleansing of the temple and I remember liking that story. I could identify with somebody running amok, I guess. Jesus turning over tables and making a whip and driving people out. That was sort of a fun scene for what was normally a boring Sunday school hour. I remember the punchline of that thing was Jesus said, "You have made this "into a den of thieves," or something like that where it was supposed to be a house of prayer and the lesson we were supposed to get was they made it noisy, and nasty, and dirty in there and people couldn't come in and pray like they wanted to. It wasn't quiet and nice, you see. I never did understand until much later that the emphasis is not on house of prayer, but upon for all people. They had set up their business in the court of the gentiles, the only place the gentiles were entitled to come and pray, and while the gentiles tried to find their way somehow to God, there was all of this commercial business going on around them and Jesus said, "You're not entitled to do that, "even to gentiles, for all people." It's a hard lesson. It doesn't get any easier, but it reaches out its arms about me and it bids me reach my arms out around you. Henry Kingsley wrote a wonderful little poem entitled Magdalene about the woman, supposedly a great sinner. Magdalene is seeking entrance into the kingdom. Magdalene at Michael's gate tirded at the pin, sang the blackbird on Joseph's thorn, "Let her in, let her in." "Hast thou seen the wounds?" said Michael. Knowest thou thy sin? She is sorry. "Sorry?" sang the blackbird. Let her in, let her in. "Thou bringest no offering," said Michael, "Not save sin!" "It is evening," sang the blackbird. Let her in, let her in. And when he had sung himself to sleep, and evening did begin, one came and opened Michael's gate and Magdalene went in. Amen. (organ music) (choral music) ♪ Holy good and holy true ♪ (choral music)

- Let us unite in this historic confession of the Christian faith.

- [Pastor And Congregation] I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified dead and buried. The third day, he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence, he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Gracious God, you hear our prayers before we speak and answer before we know our need, though we by our own wills cannot pray for what we ought. Let your spirit pray in us, drawing us to you and to our neighbors. We pray for peace in the world, for the suffering people of Lebanon, Northern Ireland,

Afghanistan, Central America, end their trial, disarm weapons, silent guns, put out ancient hate. We pray for our enemies as Christ commanded, for those who oppose or scheme against us who are also your children. May we be kept from infectious hate or sick vengeance. We pray for those who govern us who make, administer, and judge our laws, keep them hopeful, fair, and just. We pray for poor people who are hungry or cold this morning. Increase in us and all who prosper, concern for the disinherited. We pray for those who feel like outsiders, social outcasts, rejected. Help them to know the expanse of your great and gracious love and help us to mirror your love in our love. We pray for sick people who suffer pain or contend against demons of the mind or who silently wait for healing, particularly those in Duke Hospital. God grant them patience, bravery, and trust. We pray for the dying who face the final mystery. May they be kept in dignity and greet death unafraid, confident in your grace. We pray for all those who are alone and lonely who have no one to call an easy friendship. May they be befriended and know that you care for them. We pray for all people everywhere, praying that they may know your near presence and your dear love and all that they do. This we ask in your name. Amen. And now, let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God, who has offered so much to us. (organ music) ♪ Oh be joyful in the thought of him ♪ ♪ And to be joyful in the thought of him ♪ ♪ Oh by joyful in the thought of him, Christ ♪ ♪ Serve the Lord of gladness, serve the Lord of gladness ♪ ♪ And come before his presence with a song ♪ ♪ He is sure that the Lord, he is coming ♪ ♪ He is sure, that the Lord, he is coming ♪ ♪ He will be with us and not be ourselves ♪ ♪ And not be ourselves ♪ ♪ He will always be love ♪ ♪ And the sheep of his pasture ♪ ♪ Oh Lord, you're waiting to this case with thanksgiving ♪ ♪ Oh Lord, you're waiting to this case with thanksgiving ♪ ♪ With thanksgiving ♪ ♪ Come into his heart with thanks ♪ (organ music) ♪ We thank God, unto him ♪ ♪ And the good of his kingdom come ♪ ♪ We thank God, unto him, unto him ♪ ♪ And think good of his name, and think good of his name ♪ ♪ For the Lord is gracious ♪ ♪ He gives mercy, his love everlasting ♪ ♪ And his truth ♪ (choral music) ♪ From generation to generation ♪ (organ music) ♪ Oh be joyful in the Lord, oh he plans ♪ ♪ Oh be joyful in the Lord, oh he plans ♪ ♪ Oh be joyful in the Lord, oh he plans ♪ ♪ Oh be joyful, joyful in the Lord, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Glory be to the Father ♪ ♪ Glory be to the Son ♪ ♪ And to the Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ It's now and ever shall be, it's now and ever shall be ♪ ♪ Nothing without him, nothing without him ♪ ♪ Nothing without him ♪ (choral music) ♪ Amen ♪ (organ music) (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Gracious God, we have never come here hungry that we have not been sent away filled. We have never come here alone that we have not felt your presence. Again, you have come to us and blessed us and we give thanks.

- [Pastor 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. Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (organ music) (choral music) Now may the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (ecclesiastical music)