

(uplifting organ music)

- Good morning and welcome to Duke Chapel on this 24th Sunday after Pentecost. We particularly welcome this Sunday our medical school alumni who are having their reunion weekend here with us. Now let us stand for the greeting. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- The risen Christ is with us.

Congregation: Praise the Lord. (organ) ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ till all the world adore his sacred name. ♪ ♪ Come, Christians follow this triumphant sign. ♪ ♪ The hosts of God in unity combine. ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, ♪ ♪ 'till all the world adore His sacred name. ♪ ♪ Each newborn servant of the Crucified ♪ ♪ bear on their brow the seal of Him who died. ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ till all the world adore his sacred name. ♪ ♪ O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree, ♪ ♪ As thou hast promised, draw the world to thee. ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ till all the world adore his sacred name. ♪ ♪ So shall our song of triumph ever be: ♪ ♪ praise to the Crucified for victory. ♪ ♪ Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ♪ ♪ till all the world adore his sacred name. ♪

- Sovereign God, to whom belongs all we have and all that we are, we pray for insight and will to use wisely all that you have entrusted to us. May we be worthy of others' trust, generous to those who are in need and full of encouragement for our sisters and brothers in the faith. Inspire us to such selfless service that we may be worthy of your commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Amen.

- Let us pray.

Congregation: Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your holy spirit so that this word is read and proclaimed we might hear with joy which I say to us this day.

- The first reading is taken from the book of Zephaniah. Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests. At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm." Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them. The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a

day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring such distress upon the people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. This is the Word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- Please stand as we join in singing responsively Psalm 76, found on page 797 in your hymnal. (organ) ♪ In Judah God is known, whose name is great in Israel. ♪ ♪ Whose abode has been established in Salem, ♪ ♪ whose dwelling place is in Zion. ♪ ♪ There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, ♪ ♪ the sword, and the weapons of war. ♪ ♪ You are glorious, more majestic ♪ ♪ than the everlasting mountains. ♪ ♪ The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil; ♪ ♪ they sank into sleep; ♪ ♪ all the soldiers were unable to use their hands. ♪ ♪ At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, ♪ ♪ both rider and horse lay stunned. ♪ ♪ You indeed are to be feared! ♪ ♪ Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? ♪ ♪ From the heavens you uttered judgment; ♪ ♪ the earth feared and was still ♪ ♪ when God arose to establish judgment, ♪ ♪ to save all the oppressed of the earth. ♪ ♪ Surely human wrath shall praise you, ♪ ♪ when last bit of your wrath you bind around you. ♪ ♪ Make vows to the Lord your God, and keep them; ♪ ♪ Let us serve God where he lives ♪ ♪ to the One to be feared. ♪ ♪ Who gives us the Spirit among us, ♪ ♪ And makes the rulers of the earth afraid ♪ ♪ All glory be to you Oh God, and to Jesus Christ our Savior ♪ ♪ As Your Holy Spirit will set us free. ♪ ♪ As it was since time began ♪ ♪ Is now and to be forevermore. ♪

- This reading is taken from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in the darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Praise to God. (choir singing foreign language)

- You will note that all of our scripture lessons thus far, including the Mozart anthem we have just heard, speak of the judgment of God, and today's assigned Gospel also speaks of divine judgment, but in a particular way. Hear the gospel. For it will be as when a man going on a journey, called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, each according

to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded them, and made five talents more. So also the who with two talents made two talents more. But he who had received one talent went and dug the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of these servants came and settled accounts. And when he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' The master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you were a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, gathering where you did not winnow, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' The master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I haven't sown and gathered where I have not winnowed! Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. This is the Word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God. Well you know with whom we identify in this story. We're always on the side of the little, one-talent man. Maybe it's because few of us are overly endowed with talents, and maybe it's because we always like stories about the little guy who makes good. We love the story of the woman who went head-to-head with the IRS and won! Or the student who took on the mighty University administration and triumphed. We like stories about the little guy. Toward the end of his time with us, Jesus told us this story, the parable of the talents. And I think context is important. It is told toward the end of his life, just before Jesus launched out on a journey to Jerusalem. Just before Jesus left us. A man is getting ready to go on a journey, and he's rich. 'Cause when he calls his servants to him and he distributes his money, he gives them a lot of money. A talent is the largest unit of monetary measurement in the ancient near East. We're talking about 75 pounds of pure silver, a great fortune. He gives one five of these talents, another he gives two talents. Couple-a hundred pounds of silver. The third servant gets only one talent, but I remind you a talent is a lot of money. It's about 15 years of wages he gives to this servant at one time. And then the master leaves town. Which probably increases our sympathy for the servants, for we find out now that not only is he rich, but he's an absentee landlord. He's living somewhere up in the northeast, while people slave for him in the coal mines of Appalachia, or the textile mills of North Carolina. Just when these servants could use his advice on investment, he leaves town, goes on a cruise. Servants one and two go out and wheel and deal with the masters money. But servant number three, the one with just the one talent does the cautious thing, the right thing. He's got only one talent, not two, not five. Still it's a lot of money, so he goes out and digs a hole in the ground and buries the talent. Stands guard over it, keeps it safe and sound. He doesn't risk his master's money like servants one and two, he buries it. And I remind you there were no banks in that day, burying was the only intelligent way to truly protect your property. In fact the rabbis ruled if somebody gives you some money and you go bury it in the earth and then somehow it's stolen, you're not liable. You did what was responsible and prudent and wise. You buried the money. By burying the money, the servant is assured of a positive judgment from his master, and a positive judgment from us, because he's acted wisely and prudently and carefully, the same way that you or I would have

acted. What is more, this servant appears to have had a course in business ethics, because he of all the servants appears to be the only one who understands what great trust has been given over to him as steward of his master's money. It's not his money after all. He's got no right to gamble with his master's money in wild speculation. And what is more, usury, or the obtaining of interest from money, was still frowned upon in Israel. So he has done the right thing, he has done the prudent thing, the biblical thing. He buries the money. Well eventually the master returns, and he wants to know how things have gone in his absence. Servants one and two report great things have been done by them. They took the master's money, they invested it, they got great results. The master is thrilled. So thrilled he lets them keep all money, "Enter into the joy of your master." Well servant number three also has great results. "Here master. Here's the talent that you gave me. Here is your talent back all safe and sound. I didn't waste any of it. I didn't risk any of it. I didn't blow any of it on crackpot business deals, or loan any of it to my cronies. Besides, I knew that you were a hard man. The type of master who loves to squeeze blood out of a turnip. Who expects to reap where you didn't even sow, to gather where you have not scattered. I knew you were a hard man, and here's your talent all safe and sound." And the master says, "You wicked, slothful servant! Blood out of a turnip, my eye! If I were all that hard-hearted, then one would at least expected you would've put this talent in an insured CD at an FDIC bank, and then I would have at least gotten a measly 6%. Take what he has and scrape that dirt off of it, and give it to the one who's got ten talents." And right there is where we do not like this story. Because here the little guy has gotten clobbered for doing what was right, what was prudent, for doing what we would have done. We do not like this story. It is a story of how the rich get richer, and the poor get shafted. And if you know anything about Jesus, you know that he told much more palatable stories. Like they were passing the collection plate in the chapel on a Sunday morning, and all the rich were putting in bundles of bills and checks and American Express cards, and there was this one little poor widow, and she put in just a little coin, but it was all she had, and Jesus said, "She gave more than all the rest." We love that little story about the little guy. We love stories about the little guy who gets to go forward and the big guy who get clobbered. And we don't like this story that ends with this little man, this little man, clutching his one little talent, shaking, trembling, saying, "Master, I knew that you were rough. I knew that you are a tough man, sowing where you did not reap, gathering where you did not scatter, and so I did the cautious, prudent, the careful thing." And aren't those great Christian virtues: caution, prudence, carefulness? "You wicked little wretch. Take what he's got, give it to the others." By the way, if I should ever be so dumb as to give you \$100, would you note I do not want you to invest it? I want you to go bury it in the ground. I would rather get back my principal with no interest rather than risk not getting back any interest or principal. And so what do you think of this master? That's the question that Matthew means to leave in our minds when we finish this story, "What do you think of this master? Who is this master?" About all we know about him in the beginning of the story is that he is rich. That he went away, that he finally came back, and that he risked a fabulous amount of money on three servants. And then gave all the money back to two servants while taking it away from the third. Our first inclination is to agree with the third servant's assessment of the master. "Master, I knew you were a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, gathering where you did not scatter. You're a hard man, you're tough." But come to think of that, that's only the third servant's opinion of the master. The master does not deny or confirm the servant's opinion of his business methods. Which leaves the matter for us to decide. What do you think of this master? When the story begins we're really not inclined to think bad of this master. He doesn't seem like a hard-hearted business person, in fact, we're inclined to think just the opposite. I mean, how many hard-hearted business people do you

know who would drop 15 years of wages on one of their employees, and with no strings attached, and then leave town? So as the story opens, you might say that this master is anything but hard-hearted. In fact you might say that he is soft-headed, lavishing nearly a thousand pounds of sterling silver on three servants, placing no restrictions on what they are to do with it, then leaving town. And when he returns for the accounting, for the judgment, oh that's when you expect the gavel to come down. That's when you expect the judgment. When this allegedly hard-hearted business man is gonna let his servants really have it! Which is exactly what he does for servants one and two, but not as they expected. He lets them have it. He lets them have all of it! He gives them all of the money! Not just the interest they have made but the principal too! "Enter into the joy of your master." Now I ask you, does that sound hard-hearted to you? No, it's only when that third servant comes in, our man, the little guy, when he stands up to render account, that we are told, and told by him, I remind you, "Master, I knew that you were a hard-hearted man. I knew that you were tough, reaping where you haven't even sown, and here's your talent, mister tough guy, all safe and sound, and would you tell me what a good little boy I've been?" Did the servant say, "Reaping where you did not sow?" What did he think that master was doing when he threw nearly a thousand pounds of silver at them? He was busy sowing. Is the master unjustified to expect, some harvest for such sowing? What do you think of this master? The dean was going away on sabbatical and he called the department chairs together. And to one he gave five departments, and to another two departments, and to another one department. And then the dean went off to study flora in Honolulu. (laughter) The one who received five departments got busy, wheeled and dealed and established five more departments. And this was the old fashioned way, not by dividing like psychology, but new departments. And so the one that received two departments established two more, but the one who received one department sat in his office and attempted to maintain the status quo. After a long time, the dean returned in a Hawaiian shirt, and he called all three before the academic council. The chair who had received five departments presented five new ones. "Well done, good chair," the dean said. "I'll make you an assistant dean. Enter into the joy of Allen building." (laughter) And he said the same to the one who had made two departments. The one who'd received only one department said, "Oh Dean, Dean I knew that you were a tough dean. I knew that you were hard. I didn't take any chances. I didn't hire anybody, I didn't establish any new courses, I didn't take sides with the NAS! I just kept office hours and I filled out reports." "You wicked, slothful chair! You heard what I did when I was out at Stanford, how I took names, knocked heads. You should have added to the faculty load. You should have set up new courses, you should have taken out ads in the Chronicle, found new majors so that when I returned, Newsweek would rank us above Princeton. (laughter) Hard Dean, my eye. I mean, for heaven's sake, this is Duke! You've got tenure for heaven's sake, I mean what could I do to you if I wanted to? Lord, deliver me from these academic bean counters and give me some people who want to wheel and deal. Take that department from him and give it to somebody who knows how to put this little college on the map!" "I knew you to be a hard man." Really now? Does he know the master? Who is this master? Is he a hard-hearted, tough miser of a master, who expects to reap where he hasn't even sown? Or is he an extravagant, reckless, wheeler-dealer, whose faith in his servants is exceeded only by his wild generosity? I remind you how this story started. He gave them all that he had, every cent. Is it reckless for him to expect them to be as reckless as he? And when they come back to render account, you think that maybe if he's pleased he'll let 'em keep a little of the interest they've earned, but no he tells 'em, "Keep it all! Keep the interest. Keep the principal. Keep it all!" It's enough to make you ask, "Who is this master?" The great Richard Niebuhr said, "Conversion occurs in that moment in your life when you realize that the God whom you once avoided as your enemy, is in truth your

best friend." Jesus had some funny ideas about business. The sower went out to sow and he carefully placed each seed in the ground, he plowed all the furl... No, no! Jesus said a sower went out to sow and he began slinging seed in every direction. Just throwing seed. Well, some fell on rocks, and some was gobbled up by birds, but some fell on good ground and yielded much. You get that kind of result when you do that kind of sowing. "Master, I knew you to be a tough man, who expected to harvest where you haven't even sown." No. "Master we knew you to be a reckless man, who expected to harvest in exactly the same way that you sowed." And moving from sloppy agriculture to outrageous shepherding, Jesus says, "The Good Shepherd, the good shepherd will lay down his life for a sheep." You show me a shepherd who will lay down his life for a \$9.95 plus postage sheep, I show you a dumb shepherd. Or else, an unbelievably extravagant shepherd. Who is this master? And what would your life be like as his servant? (organ music) ♪ What does the Lord require for praise and offering? ♪ ♪ What sacrifice, desire or tribute did you bring? ♪ ♪ Do justly; Love mercy; Walk humbly with your God. ♪ ♪ Rulers of men, give ear! Should you not justice show? ♪ ♪ Will God your pleading hear, while crime and cruelty grow? ♪ ♪ Do justly; Love mercy; Walk humbly with your God. ♪ ♪ All who gain wealth by trade, for whom the worker toils, ♪ ♪ Think not win God's aid, if greed your commerce soils. ♪ ♪ Do justly; Love mercy; Walk humbly with your God. ♪ ♪ How shall our life fulfill God's law so hard and high? ♪ ♪ Let Christ endue our will with grace to fortify. ♪ ♪ Then justly, in mercy we'll humbly walk with God. ♪

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. O, Eternal God, even as we hear your cry to do justly and love mercy, we acknowledge that we are too often afraid to step out, and to risk anything of value in our lives. We confess that we have hidden our talents and protected ourselves, we have placed our trust in silver and gold, rather than your saving love. Help us to be faithful in our use of whatever you entrust to us. Lord in your mercy,

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- God of all, you surround us with wealth more bountiful than we can comprehend. Air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, and all that is needful for human life. We pray for those who know little of your bounty, for whom mere existence is a constant struggle. We acknowledge that their burdens should be our burdens as well. Lord in your mercy,

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- O creating God, You are present in every part of human experience. We hold before You the infant cuddled in a parent's arms, young women and men struggling to make life decisions, families seeking to resolve painful conflicts, the sick and the infirmed battling with weakness and incapacity, the dying soon to experience your new creation, Lord in your mercy,

Congregation: Hear our prayer. O redeeming God, we pray for those lands where brother and sister fight

sister and brother, divided by arbitrary borders, ideology or religion. We pray for those lands where extremes of wealth and poverty are bitterly divisive. We pray for all government officials and military personnel involved in the Persian Gulf conflict as they prepare for war, that a non-violent resolution may be found. We pray for innocent victims everywhere who fall prey to senseless violence, especially for the people of El Salvador as they observe the anniversary of the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter one year ago. Lord in your mercy,

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- O sustaining God, we pray for all who have grown bitter or weary in the journey of life, for those who weep and for those who can no longer weep, for those who feel the anguish and for those who have lost the capacity to feel. For those who live within prisons, on death row, in mental institutions, homeless shelters, shelters for battered women, runaway youth on the streets of our cities. Lord in your mercy,

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- O living Lord, we pray for the whole human family. You alone can give victory over the violence of the world, and of our hearts. Save us O Lord, give us the will and the power to share in your victory, for it is in Your Holy name we pray, Amen. As a forgiven and reconciled people, let us offer our gifts and ourselves unto God. (somber organ music) (choir singing in foreign language) ♪ Praise God for whom all blessings flow, ♪ ♪ Praise God all creatures here below, ♪ ♪ Alleluia, alleluia, ♪ ♪ Praise God above, ye heav'nly hosts ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost, ♪ ♪ Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. ♪

- We give you thanks O God for revealing Your power in the creation of the universe, for the victory of light over the darkness and truth over error, for the advancement of Your reign of justice and peace, of holiness and love, and for the revelation of Your kingdom in our midst by your son, Jesus Christ, who came on earth to accomplish your will, in return we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice, send us out in the power of your Holy Spirit, to live and to work to your praise and glory, this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray with confidence,

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, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen And now go forth in peace, encouraging and building up one another. Strengthen the fainthearted, lift up the weak, be patient with the anxious, and rejoice in all circumstances. The one who calls you is faithful. The God of Peace shall make you whole. ♪ Amen ♪ (organ) ♪ O holy city, seen of John ♪ ♪ Where Christ, the Lamb, doth reign, ♪ ♪ Within whose foursquare walls shall come ♪ ♪ No night, nor need, nor pain, ♪ ♪ And where the tears are wiped from eyes ♪ ♪ That shall not weep again! ♪ ♪ Hark, how from men whose lives are held ♪ ♪ More cheap than merchandise; ♪ ♪ From women struggling sore for bread, ♪ ♪ From little children's cries, ♪ ♪ There swells the sobbing human plaint ♪ ♪ That bids thy walls arise! ♪ ♪ O shame to us who rest content ♪ ♪ While lust and greed for gain ♪ ♪ In street and shop and tenement ♪ ♪ Wring gold from human pain, ♪ ♪ And bitter lips in blind despair cry, ♪ ♪ "Christ hath

died in vain!" ♪ ♪ Give us, O God, the strength to build ♪ ♪ The city that hath stood ♪ ♪ Too long a dream,
whose laws are love, ♪ ♪ Whose ways are brotherhood, ♪ ♪ And where the sun that shineth is ♪ ♪ God's grace
for human good. ♪ ♪ Already in the mind of God ♪ ♪ That city riseth fair; ♪ ♪ Lo, how it's splendor challenges ♪
♪ The souls that greatly dare, ♪ ♪ Yeah, bids us seize the whole of life ♪ ♪ And build its glory there. ♪ (organ
music)