

(chiming bell) (quiet choir music) ♪ As a bridegroom The Lord ♪ ♪ Came forth out of His chamber ♪ (chiming bell) (quiet choir music) ♪ As a bridegroom The Lord ♪ ♪ Came forth out of His chamber ♪ (chiming bell) (quiet choir music) ♪ As a bridegroom The Lord ♪ ♪ Came forth out of His chamber ♪ (chiming bell) (quiet choir music) ♪ As a bridegroom The Lord ♪ ♪ Came forth out of His chamber ♪

- Good morning, we welcome you on this third Sunday after Epiphany for our eighth biennial service for elected officials here at Duke Chapel. We're particularly pleased to have the elected officials of the state of North Carolina here as our guest. And all of you here for this service of worship. Now we will have a special dedication of an amnesty candle here in Duke Chapel. (whispering)

- Today we are to dedicate a candle to freedom and life. Reverend Willimon is offering this candle and it's candle stick holder in memory of his mother. As a symbol of his faith in Jesus. Who said that he came to proclaim release to the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed. He has asked Amnesty International to be a part of this dedication and a part of this candle. Amnesty International is made up of more than one and a half million persons throughout the world, who are working for the release of prisoners of conscience and against the torture and execution of anyone. A prisoner of conscience is anyone who is imprisoned merely because of their race, or their religion, or their nationality, or their gender, or what organization they belong to, or what they believe. If they have not committed or advocated violence. A man imprisoned in Greece because he's a Jehovah's Witness. A woman committed to a mental hospital in Russia because she had a copy of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in her apartment. A man imprisoned and tortured in Argentina because he was a member of a labor union. Amnesty International does it's work by calling governments to account for what they do. We write letters to government officials asking them to act like they're supposed to act, to protect the life and personhood of every individual they are given the responsibility to govern. And we name names and give details of how they are not living up to that commitment. And we ask them to stop it; to stop imprisoning citizens just because they don't like what they believe or who they are. We ask them to stop torturing and killing their own citizens. In this fallen world the powers of death are at work in governments. Amnesty International adds it's voice to life by calling governments to account. This candle, with it's barbed wire, is a symbol, first of all, of the powers of death that are at work in all governments when they try to imprison the human spirit. Or torture and kill the human body. But the light of the spirit cannot be imprisoned or extinguished and Amnesty International stands with that spirit and with that body. Thank you for this dedication Reverend Willimon.

- [Reverend Willimon] Thank you.

Keith Brodie: And now let us continue our worship of God. (organ music) (congregation sings hymn)

- Mighty God, the earth is yours and all nations are your people. Take away our pride and bring to mind your goodness. So that living together in this land we may enjoy your gifts and be thankful. (congregation)

responds) For clouded mountains, fields and woodland, for shore land and running streams, for all that makes our nation good and lovely.

Congregation: We thank you God.

- For farms and villages of our beloved North Carolina, where food is gathered to feed our people.

Congregation: We thank you God.

- For cities where women and men talk and work together in factories and shops, to shape those things we need for living.

Congregation: We thank you God.

- For the schools, colleges and universities of our state and for their work of enlightenment and formation of those who study there.

Congregation: We thank you God.

Reverend Nancy: For explorers, planners, public officials. For prophets who speak out and for silent faithful people. For all who love our land, seek justice and guard freedom.

Congregation: We thank you God.

Reverend Nancy: For vision to see your purpose hidden in our nation's history and courage to see your will.

Congregation: We thank you God. (congregation responds)

- Amen.

- Let us pray. Open our hearts oh God by the power of your Holy Spirit. So that as the word is read and proclaimed, we might be enabled to hear with joy, what you say to us this day. The first lesson is taken from the book of Nehemiah. And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the water gate and they told Ezra, the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly. Both men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it, facing the square before the water gate, from early morning until midday. In the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people. And when he opened it, all the people stood and Ezra blessed the Lord, the Great God. And all the people answered amen, amen. Lifting up their hands and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. And they read from the book, from the law of

God clearly. And they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people, said to all the people, this day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep; for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine. And send portions to him, for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. This ends the reading of the first lesson. (organ music) ♪ The statutes of the Lord are just ♪ ♪ And rejoice the heart ♪ ♪ The law of the Lord is perfect ♪ ♪ It renews my soul ♪ ♪ And though the Lord has shown ♪ ♪ It makes wise the simple ♪ ♪ The statutes of the Lord are just ♪ ♪ It rejoice a heart ♪ ♪ The command of the Lord is made clear ♪ ♪ Enlightens the eyes ♪ ♪ The statues of the Lord are just ♪ ♪ And rejoice the heart ♪ ♪ The fear of the Lord is holy ♪ ♪ Enduring forever ♪ ♪ The decrees of the Lord are true ♪ ♪ And love and righteous ♪ ♪ They are more precious than gold ♪ ♪ More than a hundred pure gold ♪ ♪ The word of the Lord is sweeter than honey ♪ ♪ Than honey fresh from the comb ♪ ♪ The statutes of the Lord are just ♪ ♪ And rejoice the heart ♪ ♪ By them your servant is warned ♪ ♪ In keeping them there is great reward ♪ ♪ Who can know where your face is ♪ ♪ Wash me from my secret wrongdoing ♪ ♪ Above all keep your servant from foolish pride ♪ ♪ Let not rule it over him ♪ ♪ Let them behold ♪ ♪ Of all my confessions ♪ ♪ The statutes of the Lord are just ♪ ♪ And rejoice the heart ♪ ♪ Let the word of my mouth ♪ ♪ The thought of my heart ♪ ♪ I lay them before you ♪ ♪ Oh Lord my Redeemer and God ♪ ♪ The statutes of the Lord are just ♪ ♪ And rejoice the heart ♪ ♪ Glory be to the Father ♪ ♪ And to the Son ♪ ♪ And to the Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ Is now and ever shall be ♪ ♪ Worthy of praise, amen ♪ ♪ The statutes of the Lord are just ♪ ♪ And rejoice the heart ♪

- Please remain standing for the reading of the gospel according to Saint Luke. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. And a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and he went to the synagogue as his custom was on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us because he has nominated me to preach good news to the poor, he has set me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and he sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he began to say to them, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. This ends the reading of the gospel. Thanks be to God. (organ music) ♪ O God of earth and altar ♪ ♪ Bow down and hear our cry ♪ ♪ Our earthly rulers falter ♪ ♪ Our people drift and die ♪ ♪ The walls of gold entomb us ♪ ♪ The swords of scorn divide ♪ ♪ Take not thy thunder from us ♪ ♪ But take away our pride ♪ ♪ From all that terror teaches ♪ ♪ From lies of tongue and pen ♪ ♪ From all the easy speeches ♪ ♪ That comfort cruel men ♪ ♪ From sale and profanation ♪ ♪ Of honour and the sword ♪ ♪ From sleep and from damnation ♪ ♪ Deliver us good Lord ♪ ♪ Tie in a living tether ♪ ♪ The prince and priest and thrall ♪ ♪ Bind all our lives together ♪ ♪ Smite us and save us all ♪ ♪ In ire and exultation ♪ ♪ Aflame with faith and free ♪ ♪ Lift up a living nation ♪ ♪ A single sword to thee ♪

- I confess that I have sometimes wondered how you elected officials felt about this service. While we were happy to have you here, I wondered how you felt about it. Was this just another civic duty on your already crowded calendars? A time for yet another preacher to give unsolicited advice to politicians? However, a

couple of years ago, after this service, that evening I was watching the evening news and I was surprised to see some of our guests being interviewed after the service. Governor Martin, what did you, what did the preacher say in the sermon today? And Governor Martin replied, well he took as his text from the middle part of the prophet Isaiah, he noted how sometimes our patriotism can become idolatrous. And then point by point he went through my sermon. (congregation chuckles) He was really listening. I'm accustomed to post-sermon comments like, why did it take you that long to say that. Or, just wait till I tell president Brodie. He was really listening. And so I've decided that you come here as you come to any service of worship, listening for a word. And I hope that you will hear that word today in the service. Governor Martin certainly did better than Calvin Coolidge who, on returning home from church one Sunday, was asked my Mrs. Coolidge, Calvin what did the preacher speak on today? Sin, replied the taciturn president. Well Calvin, she persisted, what did the preacher say about sin? He said he was against it. In case some reporter asks you after the service today, you also can say it was about sin. For today's scripture is from Nehemiah. A strange long forgotten scroll has been found in the walls at Jerusalem during some renovation. It is a Torah scroll, a collection of the law of Moses which the Lord had given Israel. And Ezra assembled a whole nation, before the water gate, no snickering. And with the whole nation there he set up a pulpit and he read all day, from the scroll of the law. Most people had never heard it. It had been lost during years of turmoil in exile in Israel. But people heard, as if for the first times, those ancient words, hear oh Israel the Lord your God is one and you shall have no other Gods before you. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself. And the people wept when they heard the law. When they heard again what God wanted of them. They wept tears of repentance. And here is God's chosen people at their very best. Hearing the law of God, listening, repenting. You get this religion of repentance in today's psalm. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The law of the Lord makes wise the simple. Who can discern his errors? Let not sin rule over me. You get this religion of repentance in today's gospel. Jesus goes home to his home town synagogue in Nazareth and what does he do? He does what Israel does on every Sabbath. He takes the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he speaks, the spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach, to proclaim. Torah, law, represents for biblical people like Israel, like us, the over againstness of God. Judaism, Christianity, are not religions that you find by rummaging around in your own ego or taking nature walks in the woods or thinking long thoughts in your study. Here is a religion which comes to us as a word, a word from the outside. In an ancient scroll found, after being long forgotten in a wall. A sermon by a young fearless, Nazarene prophet. And in such moments of hearing we're reminded that our God is a real God. Not some projection of our collective imaginations. Our God stands, over, against us, beyond us. Our God's ways are higher than our ways. Our God's thoughts deeper than our thoughts. We have to be told what this God wants of us, it doesn't come to us naturally. Martin Luther called the gospel the *externum verbum*, the external word, it comes to you from somewhere else. When this external, over, against, divine word came upon the nation that day assembled before the water gate, they wept. They wept at the gap, the great chasm between ourselves and God, between our ways and God's ways. We name that chasm sin. Sin is the name for the gap between our ways and God's ways. Historian Herbert Butterfield once commented that this doctrine of original sin is the only empirically, verifiable doctrine in Christianity. I mean that is, while everybody doesn't believe in Jesus, everybody believes in sin. Anybody, I mean if you have just a shred of honesty, even if he or she isn't religious, knows that he or she sins, makes mistakes, slip ups, makes wrong decisions. Everybody knows sin, says Butterfield. Well like a lot of historians, Butterfield was wrong. Everybody doesn't know about sin, at least in the Christian sense of the word, because sin, as we've said,

involves a sense of the over againstness of God. The distance, the gap. Sin is something God's got to reveal to us. Because sin is not simply our opinions about what's right and wrong, but rather face to face confrontation with the righteousness of God. So Luther could claim that it is a rare and difficult thing to find a real honest to God sinner. And theologian Karl Barth could even make the claim that only Christians sin. Only Christians sin? By that Barth meant, that this story of Jesus gives you and me the resources to look at our lives honestly; without props or protection. Measuring our lives on the basis of something more substantial than our own opinions. John Wesley, who stands over the door of this chapel, with a nest of pigeons on his head, once said, that the doctrine of sin is the great distinguishing point between heathenism and Christianity. To hear the words of the righteous God is to be striped naked in my unrighteousness. Now you already know how essential is the gift of honesty for individuals. You know how shallow, how dangerous, is the person who cannot admit his or her errors. Who cannot look at his or her life critically. Well confrontation with the righteousness of God and honest confession of our sin is even more essential for groups of individuals, nations. Ezra assembled the whole nation. Read them the scroll of God's law and they wept. They wept, at the gap between our ways and God's way. The gap. When they gave him the Nobel Prize, English novelist William Golding was asked, what have you learned in a lifetime of observing humanity? Golding replied, I have learned that man produces evil like a bee makes honey. Golding's insight was not original. I do not understand my own actions, confessed Saint Paul. For I do not do what I want but I do the very thing that I don't want. Sin dwells in me. Oh I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want but the evil I hate is what I do. Who shall deliver me from this bondage of sin? In the bible, sin is more than mere mistakes, slip ups, goofs. Modern people have reduced sin to psychological maladjustment. A problem of an inadequate educational system. Immaturity. But when the bible speaks of sin, it invariably does so with sexual imagery. In terms of lust, infidelity, adultery, so as to convey the deep, personal involved sense of our sin. Sin is adultery, violation of God's faithfulness with our infidelity. And so when the bible tells the story of the human race it begins with Adam and Eve, our first parents, who rebelled against God when given half a chance to do so. You and I, according to the bible, never get much beyond Adam and Eve. Our sin is original, it originates in us, the thoughts of our hearts are, according to Genesis, evil. All the way back from our youth. Especially in our youth. It is more than the mistakes we make; it's the way we're put together. We're born in rebellion; basing our lives on what is a lie rather than what is truths. Preferring our wills to God's will. Among human beings, says Paul, there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Original sin is therefore the bond linking us with one another and the gap between us and God. I have only one sermonic point this morning, here it is, the Christian doctrine of original sin is perhaps the significant Christian contribution to politics. Now Karl Marx charged, that the doctrine of original sin, was always used by people in power to defend the social and political status quo. Thomas Hobbes argued this point, if everyone is sinful no matter what, then there's no point in having a revolution because after the revolution people are gonna be just as wretched and sinful as they were before the revolution. So leave things as they are. Unfortunately the doctrines which have replaced the traditional doctrine of original sin are far from improvements. While conservative social thought, sometimes implied that the status of the downtrodden was deserved, they were lazy, heavy drinkers, so they deserved their poverty, the doctrine of original sin never said that. Rather, original sin said that the privileged classes in no way deserved their higher status. They were not meritorious, just lucky. Remember the bible says all have sinned, prince and pauper. All. Now whereas the church taught that sin is who you are rather than merely what you do. In the modern era, the predominant notion of sin as in sin is a

matter of actions, rather than our basic human disposition. Because the upper classes were less likely to commit such sins as drunkenness, whoring, idleness. Many now argued that they were better people and therefore they deserved their power. The trouble was that the next thing that happened was that Marx, and some modern liberals, overturned the meritocratic argument. The lower classes are all deserving and the upper classes all undeserving. Those who have less are automatically viewed as deprived of their rights. Those who have more are automatically viewed as people who are living on ill-gotten gain. Thus was born the politics of resentment. Now, whatever you might have against the traditional doctrine of original sin, you cannot accuse it of perpetuating unjust social arrangements by destroying the dignity of the oppressed. Rather the classical doctrine of original sin argued that the privileged, that the privileges of the privileged, were undeserved. A matter of luck rather than divine right, which carried responsibility for everybody else. The doctrine also paved the way for revolution; since it taught that current social arrangements are not a result of divine will but, like all human projects, are products of human sin. Therefore current social arrangements can, and probably should, be changed. But I'll admit that to believe in the doctrine of original sin, is to find oneself standing on an increasingly deserted middle ground. It is always to maintain a healthy skepticism of the polarized enthusiasms of the political right or left. To be highly distrustful of the Utopian crusading spirit. Especially when crusaders show little ability for self criticism. The devastating sins of self-righteousness and holy arrogance infect the political left no less than the political right. Reformers, no less than the reactionaries, do not appreciate being told that maybe, just maybe, they may be wrong. That our political zeal is mixed with a host of impure motives. I remember talking to a woman who had worked for 20 years in a congressman's office. And she said upon retirement, you know in my 20 years in a congressman's office I never had anybody come in and ask the congressman for a favor for himself. I'm only doing this for the good of others. Which led Ambrose Bierce to make the cynical comment, that politics is the conduct of public affairs for private advantage. But the believer in original sin need not sit back in self satisfied contentment pointing to the sins of others. As Luther said, when it comes to sin, we're supposed to confess our sin and throw a mantle of charity over the sins of everybody else. We've got to guard against the leftist illusion that because structures need changing, change of individual hearts is unnecessary. As well of the rightist illusion that because individual hearts need changing political and social activism is pointless. When our hearts are changed by the love of God, then are we able to apply the doctrine of original sin to ourselves. And only then may we make the specific Christian contribution, to the body politic. I remember I once heard a union organizer lament that he'd had a tough time organizing southern textile workers because it was hard to convince these thorough going southern Calvinists, that a.) all their workers are good and always sought the welfare of their fellow workers, or b.) all management is evil and is always oppressing the workers. To their credit, these southern Calvinists refused to dehumanize complex humanity through simplistic thinking. In the Gulag Arcipelago Solzhenitsyn says, "Politics would be simple, "if only there were somewhere evil people, "insidiously committing evil deeds "and then it were necessary only to identify them "and to destroy them. "But the dividing line between good and evil "cuts through the center of every human heart." Or as Jesus said on another occasion, the only difference between those who commit adultery and the rest of us who quite gleefully commit lust in the heart, it's a very small gap. Sin, it is the great equalizer. "Why should people love the church?" Asked T.S. Elliot. "Because she reminds them of sin "and other unpleasant facts they would as soon forget." I'm saying that the Christian doctrine of original sin, this unpleasant fact that you get your nose rubbed in on Sunday morning, is a great gift to the body politic. So therefore we must ask, is it a cause for pride, that our new president can boast: I don't care what the

facts are. I will never criticize America. I will never apologize for the United States. You know sometimes what you say or what you put in print can come back to haunt you. A few years ago I wrote a book on sin. And on page 199 of that book I wrote, "Christianity has a stake in keeping a society as open "with as free a flow of self criticism as possible. "From our point of view, the test of a society "would be the extent to which it admits it's own "systems of sin denial. "In 1983 when the world was shocked by the shooting of "an unarmed passenger jet by the Soviets, "we noted that Soviet leadership was incapable "of admitting mistakes. "As they see it, to admit wrong would be to admit that their "whole system was wrong. "Now this may seem a childish view, "and it is. "But their denial was more significant. "It was the result of a society built on illusion. "An illusion propped up by raw military force. "Of course there's no other way to prop up an illusion "other than by violence." On Sunday afternoon, July 3rd, 1988, I was visiting a pastor in Bonn, West Germany. And we were watching the evening news together, July 3rd, 1988. Watching them pull the bodies out of the Arabian Gulf, with the suitcases and the wreckage. And I remembered that paragraph that I had written in 1983. And it was for me, as an American, as if a scroll had been found, after having been long buried in a forgotten wall.

- Oh God your justice is like rock and your mercy like pure flowing water. Judge and forgive us. If we have turned from you return us to your way for without you we are lost people. From brassy patriotism and a blind trust in power.

Congregation: Forgive us oh God.

- From public deceptions that we can trust. From self seeking and high political places.

Congregation: Forgive us oh God.

- From divisions among us of class or race. From wealth that will not share and poverty that feeds on food of bitterness.

Congregation: Forgive us oh God.

- From neglecting the hurt, the imprisoned and the needy among us.

Congregation: Forgive us oh God.

Reverend Nancy: From a lack of concern for other lands and peoples. From narrowness of national purpose. From failure to welcome the peace you promise on earth.

Congregation: Forgive us oh God. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy upon us. Amen (organ music) (choir sings) (choir singing continues) (choir singing continues) (choir singing continues) (choir singing continues)

- Hear the good news, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That is God's own proof of His love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

Congregation: In the name of Jesus Christ I am forgiven.

- As a forgiven and reconciled people let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God. (quiet organ music) (choir singing) (choir singing continues) (choir singing continues) (choir singing continues) (organ music) ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise God all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Praise God above ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Eternal God, beneath whose rule we live and in whose grace we stand. With all that is within us we would bless Thy Holy name. We thank Thee for all that is constant in our life, that day follows night, that the seasons march in predictable succession. That the gates of mercy are ever open to us in our need. We thank thee for all that is new and changing in our life. For the audibility of people too long silent. For life giving discoveries and the sciences and experimentation in the arts. For the new people next door or up the street and the challenge of accepting change. Oh Thou whose ways are of old yet whose works are ever new. Help us learn from our past yet remain hopeful for the future. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us boldly to pray.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they 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, amen. (organ playing The Kingdom of God on Earth) ♪ Not alone for mighty empire ♪ ♪ Stretching far over land and sea ♪ ♪ Not alone for bounteous harvests ♪ ♪ Lift we up our hearts to Thee ♪ ♪ Standing in the living present ♪ ♪ Memory and hope between ♪ ♪ Lord, we would with deep thanksgiving ♪ ♪ Praise Thee most for things unseen ♪ ♪ Not for battleship and fortress ♪ ♪ Not for conquests of the sword ♪ ♪ But for conquests of the spirit ♪ ♪ Give we thanks to Thee, O Lord ♪ ♪ For the priceless gift of freedom ♪ ♪ For the home, the church, the school ♪ ♪ For the open door to manhood ♪ ♪ In a land the people rule ♪ ♪ For the armies of the faithful ♪ ♪ Souls that passed and left no name ♪ ♪ For the glory that illumines ♪ ♪ Patriot lives of deathless fame ♪ ♪ For the prophets and apostles ♪ ♪ Loyal to the living Word ♪ ♪ For all heroes of the Spirit ♪ ♪ Give we thanks to Thee O Lord ♪ ♪ God of justice, save the people ♪ ♪ From the clash of race and creed ♪ ♪ From the strife of class and faction ♪ ♪ Make our nation free indeed ♪ ♪ Keep her faith in simple manhood ♪ ♪ Strong as when her life began ♪ ♪ Till it find its full fruition ♪ ♪ In the brotherhood of man ♪

- Now may the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, go with you and be with you now and always, amen. (chiming bell) ♪ As a bridegroom the Lord came forth ♪ ♪ Out of His chambers ♪ (quiet singing) ♪ As a bridegroom the Lord came forth ♪ ♪ Out of His chambers ♪ (organ music) (congregation rustling and talking) (organ music) (organ music ends) (footsteps) (indistinct chatter)