

(contemporary gospel music) (contemporary gospel music continues)

- I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. Look to God, and be joyful. Let us pray. Fill our hearts and minds, oh God. As we gather in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit. That we may sing your praises with joy and gladness. Offer our prayers with faith and love, and learn, and then obey the lessons of your holy word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (contemporary gospel music) (contemporary gospel music rises) As we confess our sin before God, and with one another, let us simply acknowledge our individual and corporate humanness. The reality of evil within us, and then accept the forgiving grace of God. Let us pray. Oh, holy God. We come together before you remembering all the things which we have not done that needed to be done. We have seen the needs of the people around us, but we refuse to get involved. We have had the power to help the hungry and the homeless, but we have not noticed them. We have had the chance to be friends to the lonely, but we have not heard their cries or seen their tears. Help us oh God, To know our faults, and may we, by the memory of our omissions, be inspired to join in your action in the world. May we realize again that we have not fulfilled our calling in the world, to which we were called by Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen. Let us continue in silence, with our very personal words of confession. God gives power to the faint. And to those who have no might, He increases strength. Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who seeks will find. And the door will be opened to everyone who knocks. May the peace of God's forgiving spirit be yours. Amen. (contemporary gospel music) (contemporary gospel music rises) Let us hear the word of God as it is contained the book of Genesis Chapter 12:1-10. "Now the Lord said to Abraham. 'Go from your country and your kindred, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you, I will curse. And by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves.' So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him. And Lot went with him. Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. And Abraham took Sarah his wife and Lot his brother's son and all their possessions which they had gathered. And the persons that they had gotten in Haran. They set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, 'To your descendants, I will give this land' So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. Thence he removed to the mountain on the East of Bethel, and pitched his tent. With Bethel on the West, and Ai on the East. And there, he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. And Abraham journeyed on still going toward the Negev. Now there was a famine in the land. So Abraham went down to Egypt. To sojourn there. For the famine was severe in the land." Here ends the reading of the lesson for the day. May God's spirit bless to our hearing and understanding. These words from his holy word. Amen. (contemporary gospel music) Let us affirm our faith.

All: We are not alone. We live in God's world. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has

come in the true man Jesus, to reconcile and make new. Who works in us and others by His spirit. We trust Him. He calls us to be in His church, to celebrate His presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen. Our judge and our hope. In life in death. In life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And with your spirit

- Let us pray. Oh God. Our Creator, Father and Redeemer. We thank you for the wonderful gift of life,. With all its joys and responsibilities. It's struggle and its meaning. We thank you for good health and daily food. For shelter from the storm and loyalty from our friends. We thank you for the cycles of life as they bring to our lives, variety and goodness. A time of work, and a time of rest. A time of night, and the time of day. A time to rejoice, and a time to weep. A time of going out, and a time of coming in. A time to give, and a time to receive. A time to help, and a time to be helped. A time to love, and a time to let love come into our lives. Oh God, help each of us to say. "I rejoice in your gift of life to me, and I am grateful." But now God help us to look beyond ourselves, and to know that we have others to be concerned about. Those who think that darkness of soul is all that there is to life. Those who are living this moment in the valley of the shadow of death. Those who fear what this day may bring and who wonder if there will be a tomorrow. All those who have more of their life behind them, then they have a head of them. Little babies who have begun life this week. The children who seem most of all to live life to its fullest. And the youth who have the energy to live. And those of us older who have some answers, and many questions. We do not want life to be an escape, oh God. We want meaning goodness, joy, peace, satisfaction, good health. And most of all, the assurance that all is well in our relationships with you, and with our neighbor. Oh God, be very near to us now. So near that we not only believe, but we know. As Christ came to obey you and to love others. So may we be obedient and loving. We offer these prayers in the name and the spirit of our Lord, even Jesus Christ, who taught us as His disciples to pray as we pray together.

All: Our father who are 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

- It is good to be back again. I've been away for several weeks on vacation and traveling. And it's good to be back home. And so in the name of God, may I welcome you to this service of worship. As I pray that His spirit may speak to you in a way that will be meaningful and rich, and satisfying for this hour, which you have given to Him. To those of you who are new here. And there are some new students and perhaps new faculty and staff. Someone told me this week that the football players and the law school students have to get an early start on everybody else. So, if you fit into either one of those categories or in any other category, which makes you new among us. Let me welcome you. And to those of you who worship here often, let me say also welcome in the name and in the spirit of Christ. May I say a word about the Reverend Al Fisher? Our preacher for the day. One of the real leaders of the United Methodist Church in our area of the church. Having just

completed a term as district superintendent of the Goldsboro District in the North Carolina Conference, of the United Methodist Church. One who is recognized as an administrator, surely. As a committed churchman, yes. But one about whom I have heard it said more than anything else, who really cares about other persons. And having been a district superintendent, I've heard it most of all from men and others who have served in his district. And so he comes to Durham now. As the Associate Director of the Office of the rural church of the Duke Endowment, working with Dr. Wilson Nesbitt. He also is on the staff of the Divinity School. He and his wife Becky have a son who will be a first year student here at Duke beginning this week. Another son at Jordan High School, and a daughter at Hope Valley. And so we not only welcome you out to the pulpit today. But welcome you and your wife and family to Durham. And may your sojourn here be most satisfying to all of you. In the name of God. Now we hear you as you bring to us the word for today.

- To each of you loved of God and called to be Christ men and women. Grace and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. The scripture lesson this morning, tells us, of a little heard and a little you story. Of the children of Israel first venture into the promised land. You know, we usually think of Moses and connection with the promised land as he led the children of Israel through 40 years in the wilderness. Story which ends tragically for Moses, as he's not able to enter the promised land because of his own failures. But actually Abraham was the first to go into that country. And this story out of the 12th chapter of Genesis, tells about it. God speaks to Abraham. Tells him to leave his country as Kindred. His father's house and go to a land to which he would direct him. And Abraham did. Taking with him Lot. They cared all of their belongings and their families and made the long journey. When they came to this land. We find the first thing Abraham does is to build an altar to his God. Abraham found, however that the promised land was not the paradise that he had anticipated. We can imagine something of his dismay to have come so far. Travel being what it was in that time. Only to find this land which God had directed him, to which God told him he would give to his descendants, to be a land of starvation and famine. The scripture doesn't tell us what went on in his mind at this time. Perhaps he panicked. Obviously he did not wait to find out what the Lord would direct him to do in this time of crisis. But we find him packing a gain, and moving on in to Egypt. And we know from the scripture, that this was not the best alternative for him. The lesson that we learned from this story is that there is famine, even in the promised land. You know, we have a way of looking forward to a new land, or a new set of circumstances, a new position, as being able to solve all of our problems. Parents look to the time when their children will be grown, finish school on their own, as a time when they can do some of the things they haven't been able to do through the years. Only to find that there is an emotional famine in their lives because they're alone. Young people look to marriage and assume that it will mean that the solution of their problems, that they will now be accepted as full members of society. Only to find as a clan of old that they've simply swapped one set of problems for another. During World War II, our country was caught up and carried away in a great patriotic effort. We believe that if we could vanquish the Nazis that we would be living in the promised land. We did just that. But what did we find? We found that our troubles were many, in different arenas, perhaps, but many. And yet I would have to say this morning that we truly live in the promised land. There is no question about that. Never in the history of man, has there been a more affluent people, than those of us who live now, in this time, in the United States of America. I'm just amazed at what I see. As Bob indicated in his introduction this morning about our background. We've served for 20 years in the Methodist Church, and we've lived in Methodist parsonages. And they've been provided for us, and in a marvelous way. This new job that I've come to, means that we

have to provide our own housing. And so we've had to go out on the marketplace and furnish a house... Buy a house, first of all and then furnish it. You know, I've never had the opportunity of shopping for the things that go into a house. When you start looking for appliances, you can find just anything today. Looking for a refrigerator, for instance. You can find them that not only cool, but they freeze, and then they have a compartment, that'll keep ice cream real cool. They have one that'll keep butter real soft, all within the confines of the refrigerator. They have dispensers that you can get on the doors that you can fill with soft drinks, and have your own soda fountain. They make ice, and they never have to be defrosted. Now, this kind of marvel, to one who can remember when the ice truck went through town, leaving its telltale trail of water. The stove, amazing. A timer that can cut food on, and you don't even have to be there, cut it off. The oven has a new unit that heats in a hurry. Not only that, you turn a button and the oven will clean itself. Or I could go on to the washing machine that another marvel of our time. Has a half dozen settings for soft fabrics and hard for warm water, cool water, you name it, we can find it. And I can remember the wash pot in the backyard. Now what I've said about appliances, we can say about almost any area of our existence. The marvels of the medical world, the food industry, the things that you and I go down and purchase without even thinking about it. It is the promised land. But alas, there is famine in the promised land. The famine is obvious in several areas. Today, a tremendous amount of legislative time and tremendous amounts of money are being poured into a program to eliminate poverty. Yes, in the promised land of America, there is poverty. I clipped an editorial cartoon out of the news and observer sometime ago. This cartoon showed a typical American home. Had a big picture window. And on the front door, the letters USA. As you looked into the big picture window, you could see a family sitting at the table. And the table was laden with food. All kinds. I can remember the picture very vividly, the largest single item, being a turkey. The candles are lit, as if it's a festive occasion, Thanksgiving, Christmas, the 4th of July. And as the family's beginning to eat, a knock comes at the door. Standing at the door is an emaciated, gaunt, stooped old man. Written across his back the words "hunger at home" The voice from inside calls out to him, "You must have the wrong address, we're a prosperous people" And yet I was visiting in the hospital and was asked to visit, a young girl, five years old. She was only the size of a two-year old. She had been found just before she starved to death. And that in North Carolina. Poverty may be viewed as a downward circling spiral, whose parts continually feed upon each other to drive the spiral further down. For example; Unstable employment, is conducive to ill health, which means that a person can't hold a job regularly. Low family income, encourages a youth to drop out of school. And this sets the limit, in the kind of advancement he can hope for in life. A slum environment, fosters crime and juvenile delinquency. Which in turn produces an environment of social disorganization and apathy. And the slum worsens. Thus, the spiral continues downward. We have famine in promised land. And if I'm any judge today, we have a new type of famine in our country. It comes to those who live on fixed income. Living with a fixed income. They're caught up in a runaway inflation. And I can think about some of my own family who are living on on Social Security and how impossible it must be, to live in these times of inflation. There are other kinds of famine. There's a moral famine in promised land. No better example can be found and that of Watergate. last Sunday's Durham morning Herald carried an article about the 97th Convention of The American Bar Association. A great part of the time at that convention was spend on Watergate, why? Why did it happen? What were the factors that brought it on? At least two of the key speakers there, said that the men who perpetrated Watergate were immoral. Men in the highest positions in our country. Senator Sam Ervin speaking at The Bar Convention said. "The lust for political power of the presidential aides who perpetrated Watergate on America, blinded them to the laws of

God, as well as the laws and ethics of men" Senator Ervin went on to say that the laws of men would not keep Watergate from happening again. The law, he said does not make men good. The tasks can be performed only by ethics, or religion, or morality. I heard an interesting statistic, while driving in my automobile last week that verifies what Senator Sam was saying. This commentator was talking about, the number of people in prison, in various countries throughout the world. And he gave an example from a Scandinavian country where 50 people for every 200,000 people are in prison. In the United States, 200 people of every 100 thousand are now in prison. We could continue to talk about areas of famine. There are many others. There's the permissiveness of our time. The famine caused by the misuse of our natural resources. It must be obvious to you as it is to me, that even though we are the most affluent people in all time. Truly the promised land, there is famine here. What do we do about it? How do we cope with it? Well, of course the immediate possibility is to escape to Egypt, as Abraham did. As it turned out, this was not the best possibility for Abraham. To exist in Egypt meant that Abraham had to live in a false situation. We didn't go ahead and read the last part of that chapter, chapter 12 this morning. If you go on and read that, you'll find how as they went into to Egypt. Abraham became quite concerned for his own safety. Sarah his wife was a very beautiful woman. And he knew if the Pharaoh saw her. Living in that kind of a world. That he'd take care of Abraham so that he could take Sarah into his place. Abraham knew this. And so he had Sarah to become his sister. And this way she was still taken by Pharaoh, but Abraham was able to preserve his life. A far greater importance than that even, was the fact that in Egypt he could not call upon his God, could not build an altar to his God. He had to live a lie. But he chose to live with these kinds of ambiguities. You know, we're often caught in the same situation. We find ourselves in places where it's much easier to try to escape from facing the realities. Even if it means we have to live a lie. There are many ways of escaping, it's possible to escape in religion. We can accept an unrealistic religion and by such action, escape. It can be said of a certain kind of religion that it's so heavenly minded that it's no earthly good. It is this kind of religion that Karl Marx called "The opiate of the people" I suppose it was the only kind of religion that he saw. And he took this as normative, of what the Christian life is about. Some people are saying that there's a religious revival underway in our country today. It is an extremely personal religious experience as emphasized, if indeed such a revival is going on. My observation of the new pietism of today is that it too has a danger, of being so inwardly directed, and so preoccupied with personal salvation, that it fails to seize the concern that God places upon all of us, for all of the people about us. It is though possible. For us to find an escape, in our religious experience. There are other ways of escaping. We can employ easy solutions. This is to take an action that will handle the situation for the moment. I suppose that, we could look about us at our friends and find many people who find various kinds of temporary means of escape. A man finds that he's in trouble with his son. And he says to him, "I know you can do better. I'm going to give you an automobile, will you do better?" What's his response? "Of course dad" Does he? Of course not. Not even God helps in that kind of a situation. God can only help him change when the pain of his rejection has been removed. So many people in their personal experiences though, try to escape from the realities about them from the famine that seems to have come to their lives. One of the great problems of our time is alcoholism. More often than not it is an escape. A temporary solution to a problem that needs to be handled. Well, serving for 15 years in local churches across Eastern North Carolina. I watched an interesting phenomenon take place. During a normal pastorate in a church. There would be a time when there would be a new family to come in to the church. Usually they would have moved from another church within the community. But they would see the church that I was serving as the answer to their needs, so they joined. It wouldn't be long before they began

to find problems with that church, and with that preacher, and with that situation. And before many months were gone, they'd be moved on to another church. Trying to find a solution to their problem, a temporary one. They were trying to escape. Because they were not willing to look within themselves to see if the problem might really be theirs, and not the churches. While serving as superintendent I saw this in another way with churches who felt that their problem was with their pastor. And in the Methodist church we moved people, at annual conference time. And so a pastor normally stays for a year. And after Christmas usually as we began to work toward conference. Many of these churches will come and say, "you know, this man, or this woman is just not doing the job for us. We've got to have another pastor." And so it goes through the agony, and finally make a change. And next year is probably going to be the same problem again. Because very often, the problem is that of the churches, and not the pastors. No matter how we choose to escape, sooner or later we come to the moment of truth. That's what happened to Abraham. He was a good man. In fact, Abraham was a great man. We look at him and his life. We must come to understand that. But he was also a normal person. And so his tendency was to try to escape from his problems. So when the famine came to them, as they moved into Canaan, they began to look somewhere else, to try to escape from. But the day of judgment came to Abraham. The Pharaoh found out about his deceit. And he had to leave. And he did an interesting thing. For instead of continuing to travel he turned back, to where he had been. And this opens a second choice that's available to us. It's to tough it out in the promised land, during the time of famine. Perhaps if we struggle in these hard times, and these difficult times, and because of the struggle, we will find ourselves able to build a stronger tomorrow. To face the famine, is the manlier. Very often the one we try to avoid. This is exactly what Abraham did in the final analysis. Turning back, he went to where he had built the altar in the beginning, when he returned there to Ai, he fell down and call upon the name of the Lord. We cannot help, but wonder, how different it would have been, had Abraham done that in the first place. The trouble is, he wasted so much time, trying to escape, before he faced the reality of the situation. And you know, our tragedy is the same. We to try every means of escape we can, before we really face the issues, and try to deal with them constructively. We have in our stereo record collection, the music from a Broadway musical titled Purlie, the music is exciting. The major contribution of the play is the story. It takes place on a small Georgia town, in the recent past. The play is a story of Purlie, a young black preacher. And his attempts to get Big Bethel, which is a church not being used. From which he can preach his gospel of freedom, his new gospel as he calls it a freedom. Purlie talks about himself as a preacher, and he says, "I'm a New Fangled Preacher Man." He's come back to Georgia to free his people. But apparently finds himself frustrated as he tries to get Big Bethel. The only way he can get it is through Captain Ketchup, who is a white landowner in Georgia. And he seems frustrated at every turn. And finally, he develops a scheme, not all honest, but nonetheless away to get Big Bethel. But even that scheme is uncovered, and the plan fails. He's frustrated, he's defeated. So he sees it on it answer as for him to leave, to go back North. And at this point in the musical, he sings about it with a sister-in-law Missy. Purlie sings. "You can have your black-eyed peas, the morning glories and the trees. You just can't do the things you please crawling on your knees down home. Up North, that's the place to be Up North Up North. Up North ask Missy, you're seven living in a room, up above a cheap saloon. Your future is tied to a broom, freedom doesn't bloom Up North, down home about is better off, down-home." Purlie responds. "I'm sick of flopping in this shack, paper stuffing in the cracks, toting around a burlap bag. The world gets on your back, down-home. Up North sister, picture me Up North." and Missy Sings. "I see you sitting on a concrete step. I see you picking knots and three have been. You're never loving soul, he did. That's the deal you'd get Up North, down home a body is better off

down-home. The answer brother to your prayers ain't living up no flight of stairs, is having you a fair share of the old country air, down-home." What Missy was saying to Purlie. What we come to understand out of Abraham's experience, as he went on into Egypt, is that the great issues of life, the times of famine, must be faced where they are. It is a marvelous country in which we live. It is truly the promised land, there are problems. Problems and the government. Problems in the culture in our society, in our community. In our own homes and in our personal lives. The escape mechanisms that we employ, our stop gap at best. For each of us, there must be a way to deal with them, now and effectively. For I believe that's the only hope for meaningful existence. And I believe that's the lesson that we come to understand, out of this first venture into the promised land. Let us pray. Almighty God who has given so much to us. Who has given us life in this time. Our prayer is that each day will find us growing, dealing with the problems that come. Knowing that famine is a normal part of life. And that if we live long enough, some kind of famine will test our faith. Give us the strength to deal with it at that moment. For we know that victory comes, as we seek to deal with these problems, with your help, and your strength. For you have promised us that through you, all things are possible. Amen. (liturgical organ music) (soft organ music) (man singing indistinctly) (bright organ music) (man singing indistinctly) (contemporary gospel music)

- Oh, Lord, our God. Receive our praises and our prayers, and these offerings which we bring before you. With these gifts, we offer also ourselves, our souls and bodies, a living sacrifice. Holy acceptable to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (contemporary gospel music) The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen. (church bells toll) (jubilant organ music)