

(tranquil organ music)

- Good morning. I'd like to welcome you to Duke Chapel. We are privileged to have with us in the ministry of worship the Reverend Dr. William B. Lawrence, the Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School as the presiding minister. Also as a lector, Miss Eliza Ferguson who is a graduate student at Duke in French History and a member of the congregation and Eliza is getting ready to spend a year in Paris studying. We also welcome Mr. Sean Turner, a graduate of Duke Divinity School in the Class of 1996 and he is also departing this summer for a year in Yorkshire to serve a church there. We are grateful for their leadership with us in this service. As you may know, many in faith communities have been concerned about the threats against predominantly black churches in North Carolina and across the South. On Wednesday, July 10th at seven o'clock p.m., Duke Memorial United Methodist Church downtown is hosting a prayer vigil to pray for an end to these threats and for peace in our community. We hope you will be able to attend. And now let us continue with the call to worship. Please stand as we pray together. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel. (congregation mumbling) Blessed be God's glorious name forever. (congregation mumbling) (tranquil organ music) (congregation singing)

- Let us pray. Almighty God, to you all hearts are open. All desires known. And from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name through Christ our Lord, amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together the Prayer for Illumination.

All: Open our hearts and minds, oh God by the power of your Holy Spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we may hear your message with joy this day. Amen.

- The Old Testament reading is from the book of Genesis, chapter 24 verses 34 through 38, 42 through 49 and 58 through 67. So he said, I am Abraham's servant, the Lord has greatly blessed by master and he has become wealthy. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys and Sarah, my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old and he has given all that he has. My master made me swear saying, you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I live but you shall go to my father's house to my kindred and get a wife for my son. I came this day to this spring and said, oh Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going. I am standing here by this spring of water. Let the young woman who comes out to draw to whom I shall say, please give me a little water from your jar to drink and who will say to me, drink and I will water your camels also. Let her the woman who the Lord has appointed for my master's son. Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder and she went down to the spring and drew. I said to her, please, let me drink. She quickly let down the jar from her shoulder and said, drink and I will also water your camels. So I drank and she also watered the camels. Then I asked her, whose daughter are you? She said, the daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's

son who Milcah bore to him. So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsmen for his son. Now then, if you deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me and if not, tell me so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left. So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men and they blessed Rebekah and said to her, may you, our sister become thousands of myriads, may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes. Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. Now, Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi and was settled in the Negev. Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field and looking up, he saw camels coming and Rebekah looked up and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel and said to the servant, who is the man over there walking in the field to meet us? The servant said, it is my master. So she took her veil and covered herself and the servant told Isaac all the things he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah and she became his wife and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Praise be to God.

- The Psalm appointed for today is number 72 verses one through eight found in your Hymnal on page 795. All stand and sing the Psalm and Gloria responsively. (tranquil organ music) ♪ Give the king your justice, O God ♪ ♪ Thy righteousness unto the king's son ♪ ♪ May he judge our people with righteousness ♪ ♪ And thy poor with judgment ♪ ♪ Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people ♪ ♪ And the hills in righteousness ♪ ♪ He shall judge the poor of the people ♪ ♪ He shall save the children of the needy ♪ ♪ May he live while the sun endures ♪ ♪ And as long as the moon throughout our generations ♪ ♪ He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass ♪ ♪ As showers that water the Earth ♪ ♪ In his days, may righteousness flourish ♪ ♪ And peace abound 'til the moon be no more ♪ ♪ He shall have dominion also from sea to sea ♪ ♪ And from the river unto the ends of the Earth ♪ ♪ All glory be to you, creator ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ our Savior ♪ ♪ And in Christ Jesus throughout all generations ♪ ♪ As it was time at time began ♪ (congregation mumbling) ♪ Forevermore ♪

- Please be seated.

- The New Testament reading is from the seventh chapter of Saint Paul's letter to the Romans beginning with the 15th verse. I do not understand my own actions for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me. That is in my flesh. I can will what is right but I cannot do it for I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand for I delight in the law of God in my inmost self but I see in my members another law at war with the law in my mind making me captive to a law of sin that dwells within my members. Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God. (tranquil organ music) (choir singing)

- The Gospel lesson is taken from the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew verse 16 through 19 and 25 through 30. But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another. We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We wailed and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating nor drinking and they said he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. At that time Jesus said, I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yolk is easy and my burden is light. This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

- This past Thursday, we celebrated the 4th of July, the birth of our country and the great gift of our freedom. Freedom is a value that we hold dear and well we should for it is a privilege that has been hard won and hard kept. Many people have worked to protect the gift of freedom on the battlefields and in our courts, in our schools and in our churches, in our public spheres and in our private lives. Freedom must never be taken for granted or it can be lost quickly through violent forces which overtake it or slowly, almost imperceptibly through the subtle but no less destructive forces which bind it link by link until we are burdened with unbearable restrictions which chain our liberties. It might be difficult to find very many values that Americans can agree upon but freedom is one of them. So when Jesus says, "Take my yolk upon you," it is understandable that some of us might pull back with caution and resistance. We don't wanna be yoked to anything or anyone. It threatens our hard-won freedom to decide for ourselves who we will be and what we will do with our lives. We wanna be faithful, we wanna know God but in our own way and on our own terms. The idea of being yoked, submitting ourselves to Christ's authority over our lives, agreeing to be obedience to his will, allowing ourselves to be led rather than to decide. The idea of being yoked is a concept that is difficult for most of us to embrace. We like having more control than that even with God. We prefer to know what the rules are and to figure out how to meet them on our own. We're good at doing what is necessary to get ahead in school, in business in social circles, so why should our spiritual life be any different? Just tell us what the requirements are and we'll decide how best to fulfill them. We're a can-do society, a community of high achievers and we know how to come out on top. But it is precisely to a community like us that Jesus was speaking when he prayed, "Thanks you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth "because you have hidden these things from the wise "and revealed them to infants." The privileged communities that Jesus addressed. The Pharisees and the Scribes, the educated and the affluent thought they had it all figured out. They were literate, they knew the law and they spent enormous amounts of time and energy and money to follow and obey its minute details. They had figured out the rules and thought that in the process they had figured out what it took to please God and consequently, to gain God's favor. As Barbara Brown Taylor says, "In their hands, God's law became a heavy yolk, "a bulky, burdensome thing

"that they were nonetheless willing "to bear because they wanted to stay on top." They were the ones who knew the rules, they were the skilled law keepers who held the places of privilege in Jewish society. In matters of religion, they were the most diligent and most accomplished. They were simply better than the common people around them and they were in control. That's why Jesus was such a threat to their well-ordered existence when he said that even infants could understand how God was revealed and what God required. Even infants could understand that it had to do with the quality of relationship between God and us and between us and other people. It had to do with putting God first and loving everyone and everything that God loved. And perhaps more to the point, it couldn't be manipulated. It was easy. It was easy to understand. But it couldn't be manipulated or controlled by those who thought they had it all figured out. Jesus exposes the foolishness of our attempts to control God by following a set of rules or by accruing points for good deeds done. In our truest moments, we know that we can't ever do enough to please God, to be worthy before God. For we know that the capacity for good and for evil lies within each one of us. Still, sometimes it seems easier to trust in our own capacity to know and to do what is right than to risk losing our freedom by accepting the yolk of Christ. We fear that his yolk would be a much greater burden which would squeeze all the joy out of life and make it one long march of duty and drudgery, always demanding more and more and more of us. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus said, "My yolk is easy "and my burden is light." It was God's desire through Jesus Christ to lighten our burden, to increase rather than diminish our freedom. As Taylor says, "It isn't about pushing ourselves to do more, to be more, "all God has ever asked is that we belong to him. "The burden that Jesus offers is much lighter "than the one we design for ourselves. "The yolk easier." No longer do we have to listen to that nagging inner voice that says you've got to do more, you've got to be more in order to earn God's love. There are no pre-qualifying exams that you have to pass before you come to Jesus. We have nothing to prove and perhaps even more importantly, nothing to fear. For the yolk is not a heavy, shackled chain or freedom but a way of coming into relationship with him so that our burdens might be shared and our load lightened. Have you ever seen pictures of two animals yoked together? They're joined at the neck by a wooden frame that allows them to work together and with a well-matched pair, they can work all day without wearing out because under a shared yolk, one can rest while the other pulls. They can take turns bearing the brunt of the burden and cover for each other without ever laying down the load. At the end of the day, they may be tired but they're not exhausted because they have worked together as a team. When we accept the yolk of Christ, he doesn't add to our burden, he takes our burden upon himself to share the load. We are in a sense joined at the neck. His mind and our mind working together to share the burdens of life and to fulfill the requirements of love. We become a team and with his help, we can accomplish more than we ever could individually. One scholar points out that the yolk is not one that Jesus imposes but one that he wears. It is as if he is saying become my yolk mate and learn how to pull the load by working together beside me and watching how I do it. The heavy labor will seem lighter when you allow me to help you with it. When we become yoked to Jesus, it is as if we become apprentices who work beside him to learn through watching and doing. What it means to be his disciples. When we decide that we want to become a follower of Jesus, and it is our choice alone, it means that we commit ourselves to a learning process. We don't start out having it all right and we don't need to. We only have to be willing to let Jesus teach us how to deal with the problems that we face, how to develop our best skills and minimize our weaknesses, how to grow and change. How to let go of the things that get in the way. How to be obedient even when it is difficult. How to be in a loving relationship. How to serve. It is important to note that when we put on the yolk of Christ, we don't know exactly what paths we

will travel together and what work we will share. That's difficult for some of us who like to have everything planned out, goals set, every contingency prepared for. It is possible that we may get led in a direction that we never would have gone on our own. I know because if you had asked me 15 years ago what I would now be doing in my life, serving as a minister would not even have been in the list of possibilities. But I've never been sorry that I followed this strange, unpredictable path. Sometimes stumbling and hesitant to be sure, but also rewarding and fulfilling in ways that I never could have planned. It's hard for us to let go of our need to control our lives and follow where Jesus leads but we can take the risk because he's gentle and humble in heart. He never imposes himself upon us but lovingly invites, waiting for us to come to him when we decide that we're ready. We can trust him because he's trustworthy. The yolk that he offers is the yolk of love and the desire to serve us. Isn't that amazing? We are able to serve God because in Christ, God serves us. Because he has walked the paths that we have walked, and suffered the pains that we have suffered, he knows us intimately and he has our best interests at heart. He leads us gently, challenging us to greater faithfulness yet ever sensitive to our weaknesses and our needs. We may be led into some unexpected and surprising ways of serving but it is never against our will and it is never beyond our strength to endure for as we take Christ's yolk upon us, we discover deep down, all the way down, rest for our souls. Christ understands that the burdens which most weigh heavily upon us, the ones which wear us out are not so much the physical ones but the spiritual and emotional ones. It is not as much the financial struggle as the worry about tomorrow. It is not so much living without the loved one as the emptiness left in the heart. It is not so much the illness itself as the fear of death. It is not so much the rape as the terror we live again and again. It is not so much the failure as the fear of rejection. It is not so much the offense against us but the anger which hardens the heart. It is the burdens of the soul which wear us out and make us feel most alone. Christ invites the weary and heavily burdened to let him share our load and give us the kind of deep inner rest that we could never find on our own. I have a friend here from Liberia and we recently discussed the civil war in his country. People killing each other in the streets, the lack of food and water, no phones, no power, no transportation in or out of the city. There've even been reports of cannibalism among the warring factions. My friend, a young man in his 20s, already lives with the scars of one civil war and the memory of the unspeakable atrocities that he saw as he tried to escape his country and now he must bear the anxiety of another war, not knowing whether his family is alive or dead. I ask him, "How do you do it?" "How do you live with what you've seen?" "How do you bear the uncertainty, the worry "for your family?" And he said to me, "It is impossible to bear. "It is impossible to forget or to forgive, "it is impossible to work, "to eat, to sleep "yet for the yolk of Christ, "which shares my burden and gives me rest." And looking into his eyes, I believed him for they were there a peace and a rest that were not of this world. When we're yolked with Christ, we're able to bear even the impossible burdens because we don't have to bear them alone. In him we find rest for our souls. Rest from the guilt that we can't escape. Rest from the fears which plague our dreams. Rest from the anger that won't let us go. Rest from the wounds that won't heal. In the yolk of Christ, we find rest for our souls and freedom from the heavy burdens that we carry. Every night, on Fridays in the Tzai community in France, there's a service around the cross. In a very moving ritual, an icon of the cross is laid on the floor and people are invited to come forward and to literally lay their burdens upon Jesus. For hours people come to the cross. Young and old from all over the world, the affluent and the poor. Life-long Christians, new Christians and those who are simply searching. With foreheads pressed against every inch of the cross, they share their burdens with Christ and as they walk away, often with tears of gratitude, you can see that the load has been shifted and the burden is easier to bear because it is borne by two. This simple,

moving service offers a visible symbol of the invitation that Jesus Christ extends to all of us. Come to me, all you that are weary and that are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yolk is easy and my burden is light. (lively organ music) (congregation singing)

- May I invite you to be seated and join me in prayer. The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Oh God, who in your only son Jesus has invited us to come to you with our burdens and find rest. We accept your invitation. From within the walls of this place that is built to your glory and for our comfort, we come to you. From within the bounds of this nation that began by declaring its trust in your providence and its trust in our freedom, we come to you. From within the limits of our own conditions of status and circumstance, age and ethnicity, health and hope, we come to you. Lord, in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- Oh God, in your infinite love, you have room for all of our needs and more. We can name them and you can grant us rest from them. We call them cancer and stroke, AIDS and Alzheimer's, we call them hunger and loneliness, addiction and abuse. We call them fear and guilt. Ignorance and injustice. We know what they are doing to our loved ones. We know what they are doing to our neighbors. We know what they are doing to ourselves. But we cannot carry them much longer. So wrap them in the emotions of our hearts. Let us pack them into our words of prayer and grant that we can bring them to your throne of grace and ask you to grant us rest. Lord, in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- We pray for those who help us along the way and for the burdens they carry in their lives. We pray for those who stoop in the fields to labor, that crops might grow and be harvested and that we might have food to eat. We pray for those who gather for worship in houses dedicated to your name and to your people's comfort that they might worship you in freedom and security and be unafraid that the fires of hell will touch them or the fires of Earth will touch their houses of praise. We PRAY for those who step into pulpits day after day to preach that your church might be spiritually nourished. We pray foR those who stare inTO laboratory microscopes that diseases might yield their secrets and reveal their cures. We pray for those who police our streets, for those who dance in our theaters, for those who compete in our arenas, for those who pursue justice in our courts, for those who make music in our halls and homes, that all might find joy and peace in serving you and in sharing those same gifts with us. Lord, in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- And grant that all who grieve this day will find healing and hope in their own hearts as they surrender their loved ones to your eternal mercy and everlasting care. Remind us that your love is not limited to this place,

this land or this lifetime. For those whom we love but can no longer see, we pray your grace and heavenly blessing as we name them in the silence of their hearts. Lord, in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- All of these things we bring to your throne of grace in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

Congregation: Amen.

- As the people of God who have been blessed with the gift of life, so we in thanksgiving to God return signs and symbols of those gifts and with words of thanksgiving, and tangible gifts, we offer ourselves and our lives to the Lord. Let us prepare to offer those gifts. (tranquil organ music) (choir singing) (dramatic organ music) ♪ Praise God from Whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise Him, all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Praise Him above, ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Let us pray. To you, oh Lord, we turn in prayer. As the humble servants who have received gifts in abundance from you, from the first gift of a breath of life that was ours to the dying moment when we will surrender our lives, our souls and spirits unto you at last. Our lives are filled with the journey of gifts from you. For the love we have received within family and household, for the love that sustains and nourishes us throughout the ages and the faithfulness of your church. For the gifts of music that fill houses of worship and halls for concerts, for the gifts of material blessings, that have enabled us to find leisure and comfort as well as food and care. For all of the blessings that you have granted to us, oh Lord, our offers in sacrifice and praise returning thanksgiving to you are but tokens to your glory of all that is ours and now, oh Lord, we pray your blessing upon these material gifts that we have offered that they might be both signs and tokens of the thanksgiving of our hearts as well as means of ministry to all of your people. Oh Lord, let your blessing accompany every gift given and every heart offered that we will find not only peace within our lives and with you but with our neighbors as well whom you have called Us to serve. In gratitude and thanksgiving, we give you praise and glory and dare to call upon you the way your son, our Savior Jesus Christ has taught us.

All: Our Father how 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 not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (lively organ music) (congregation singing)

- And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you and keep you. ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ (dramatic organ music)