

(organ music playing) (organ music playing)

- One of the joys of being around this place in the summer is to welcome so many visitors and guests from all around the world. So a warm welcome to you this morning, here to Duke Chapel for this service of worship. Wherever you are coming from, we welcome you and hope that this time of worship may be a blessing for you. And now let us stand and join with one another in the greeting. God prepares a place for us and welcomes us to this time of worship. (congregation replies in unison) God counts each person precious and irreplaceable, a unique creation, beloved and valued. (congregation replies in unison) God meets us where we are and inspires us by what we may become. (congregation replies in unison) (organ music playing) (congregation singing joins in)

- Let us pray. Creator of all things, form us anew in the likeness of Christ. Open up to us possibilities we cannot imagine and free us from self-imposed limitations. Help us explore the depths of faith and the heights of possibility. Help us open ourselves to your healing power, and your saving grace. For wherever we go, you are with us. Unite us now with your presence, as we worship in spirit and in truth, amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together, the prayer for illumination. Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we might hear with joy what you say to us this day, amen. The first reading is taken from Paul's letter to the Colossians, the first chapter, beginning with the 21st verse. And you, who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His fleshly body, through death, so as to present you holy and blameless, and irreproachable before Him, provided that you continue, securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. I am now rejoicing in my sufferings, for your sake, and in my flesh, I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me, for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations, but has now been revealed to his saints. To them, God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this, I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

- Today's psalm is number 139, verses 13 through 18, found on page 855 in the hymnal. Please stand and sing responsively. (organ music begins playing Psalm 139) ♪ For it was you who formed my inward parts ♪ ♪ You knitted me together in my mother's womb ♪ ♪ I praise you, for you are fearful and wonderful ♪ ♪ Wonderful are your works ♪ ♪ You know me very well ♪ ♪ My frame was not hidden from you ♪ ♪ When I was being made

in secret ♪♪ Intricately woven in the depths of the earth ♪♪ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance ♪♪ In your book were written ♪♪ All the days that were formed for me ♪♪ When none of them as yet existed ♪♪ How profound to me are your thoughts, O God ♪♪ How vast is the sum of them ♪♪ I try to count them ♪♪ They are more than the sand ♪♪ When I awake, I am still with thee ♪♪ O Glory be to you, creator ♪♪ And to Jesus Christ, our savior ♪♪ And to the Holy Spirit resting in He ♪♪ As it was when time began ♪♪ Is now and will be forever more ♪ (organ music resumes) (choir begins singing)

- Today's gospel is from the 17th chapter of Luke. On the way to Jerusalem, He was passing along between Sumeria and Galilee, and as He entered a village, He was met by 10 lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, master, have mercy on us! When he saw them, he said to them, go, show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. And he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now, he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, were not 10 cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God, except this foreigner? And he said to him, get up, go your way. Your faith has made you well. This is the word of the Lord. (congregation replies in unison) This past week, we were on vacation, down at North Myrtle Beach. One day we got a boat, went up the inter-coastal waterway to the little town of Calabash. A town of restaurants and shrimp boats, and we tied up the boat at this rickety sort of dock, at this little eating place. It was no more than a shack, there at the dock. And as we were eating these shrimp sandwiches I noticed, over the bar, was printed in, painted in neat, indelible letters, this statement: Free Beer Tomorrow. Someone in our group said, gosh, it's a shame we weren't here tomorrow. (congregation chuckling) And this sort of dried up, salty looking person behind the bar said... Nobody has ever been at this place on the right day. (congregation chuckling) Now, even though that is an inappropriate story with which to begin a sermon, I want you to remember it. In today's scripture, Jesus meets 10 very sick people. And as a pastor, I know what it's like to be around sick people. Like any pastor, I spend a fair amount of my time around sick people. And from what I can observe, sickness, what these 10 people have is about the worst that life can do to you. And I'm not only talking about the pain that often accompanies sickness, but the mental, the spiritual anguish as well. Because sickness is an every day in life experience of our finitude, our vulnerability. Sickness, at its worst, is a foretaste of what it is like to have the world go on without you, to lie there in pain as the world is passing you by. It is just a little taste of what it will be like to be nothing. Sickness is a reminder that life is fragile and frail and vulnerable, in short, that life is terminal. Sickness is a brush with death. And maybe that's why many of us who are well are so threatened by sick people. It is as if every sickness, to us, is contagious. Oh, we send a card, and maybe we'll make a call, but we find it difficult to visit, we find it difficult physically to be confronted with someone who is ill. And maybe that's why, in the modern world, we isolate the ill in modern leper colonies, hospitals, nursing homes, rather than risk caring for them ourselves, we touch the sick only with rubber gloves. And when you're sick, it is quite normal for that sickness to just take over your whole life. For every waking moment to be spent in thoughts of when you will be well, when you will be restored to normality. There's only one thing you want in life when you're sick, and that is to be, again, normal. And out in Sumeria, between Sumeria and Galilee, Jesus encounters 10 very sick people. He is on His way to Jerusalem. You know why he's going to Jerusalem? You know why, you know what awaits him in Jerusalem, death. And on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus, this outcast, this man who is marked for death meets 10 other people who are marked for death. Here are 10 people who are also outcasts, because of their leprosy, they have been cast out of their home,

away from family, to wander helplessly because they are afflicted with this dreaded disease. Can you think of any parallels to leprosy, in our own day? Yes, you can. What I'm saying is, here are not only 10 just sick men, but here are also 10, I think without stretching things too far, dead men. They are marked for death, and I don't mean death sometime in the future, I mean death today. Like Jesus, they are marked for death. Because as far as these 10 leper's families are concerned, they are dead. And moreover, we find out that at least one of them is a Samaritan. So he is a dead duck on at least two counts. Not only is he a leper, but he's also a member of this despised outcast, half-breed, religious mixing race, these Samaritans. So we're dealing here with 10 people who are not just dead physically, but are also dead spiritually, emotionally, socially, they are dead. And standing a distance from Jesus, as they are required to do by law, they call out to Jesus, Jesus, have mercy upon us! And Jesus looks at them and says something strange, go show yourself to a priest. And that's strange, he's thinking of Leviticus 14, and in Leviticus 14, it says that if a leper happens to get healed, he is to go and show himself to a priest and the priest will certify that he has been cleansed, because it was considered, when you had leprosy, you were so unclean, you were not allowed to come to church, to worship in the temple, to worship God. And so you had, if you were healed, to be certified that you were now clean, by the priests. And Jesus' command is a bit confusing. They have asked to be healed, but you will note, Jesus does not heal them. He's only told them to go out and act as if they were healed. Go, and present yourself to the priest, as if you were healed, made whole, accepted living being. And with that, Luke says, they go. And he doesn't say that they go to the temple and show themselves to the priests, or maybe they just go, bumping into one another trying as fast as they can to get away from Jesus, who's talking so weirdly. At any rate, they go, just like they've been healed. And on the way, they are healed, and nine of them kept going. Apparently for these nine, they made no connection between Jesus and their recovery from leprosy. After all, Jesus didn't do what they expected, he didn't spit into the ground and take some of the mud and dab it on them, as he did the blind man. He didn't command some demon to come out of them as he did on a number of other occasions with sick people. He didn't say to them, be healed. As far as they were concerned, Jesus had nothing to do with their healing. But there was one leper who made the connection. He came back, loudly praising God, screaming at the top of his lungs, thank you Jesus, thank you, thank you. And Luke notes, oh yes, he was a Samaritan. He was a two-time loser. Not only has he got this dreaded disease, but he is an outcast Samaritan. And Jesus says, hey, what happened to the other nine? Has only one come back to say thanks? And him, a Samaritan of all things? Get up, go your way, your faith has saved you. Now, what do you make of this medical miracle? One Samaritan leper had faith, and was healed. The other nine apparently had no faith, and they were also healed, which suggests to me that maybe, in our medically infatuated society, maybe this is really not so much a story about healing in the first place. It is a story that makes you ask, well what's the difference between the thankful nine, or the unthankful nine, and this thankful one? The unthankful majority and the thankful minority, what's the difference? You wonder what Jesus is pinpointing with his, get up and go, your faith has saved you. I suggest you think about it this way, did not we say that these 10 lepers were all dead people? Whether you're talking physically, spiritually, emotionally, socially, they are dead. They would love to get healed, like any sick person would. That is, they would love again to be normal, which they assume, once they were well, would bring them back to a normal life. That's all they ever asked for, just a chance to now be like other people, to be normal, to have an opportunity, to go back home and do whatever they were doing before their sickness, to be normal. And they assume that that is what Jesus is all about. Healing people, a return to the normal and a revival of the ordinary for people whose infirmity has made them abnormal. That's what we think

Jesus is about. Jesus is about picking us up and dusting us off and then fixing us up and helping us, again, to resume a normal life. But I think that one of these Samaritans realized that Jesus is after more than merely normal. And he says, thanks. He realized that his healing has put him into a relationship with Jesus; he's got faith, he's been given eyes to see that it is this Jesus who's made him whole and alive again. He hasn't just been healed, but he's been resurrected. All the other nine wanted out of Jesus was just to be made well, to go back home again, to be like everybody else, to go back to school, to try and do work on Mondays, to eat yogurt out of plastic containers, to maybe meet some nice Galilean girl and settle down and have a couple of kids and have a station wagon and be normal. And who would blame them, the way life has been robbed of them by their sickness? And maybe later, someone would say to these, now normal nine, weren't you once a leper? And they would say, oh who, me? I've never been sick a day in my life, I eat yogurt, I watch my weight, I've always been normal. And I think that that one Samaritan came back and said thanks, not simply because he had been cured, but because Jesus said, you've been saved, because he alone saw that his healing was really resurrection, and that resurrection isn't something for tomorrow, but something for today. He was saved and embraced by Jesus as a leper, when he was still sick, untouchable, before he got well. He alone realized, that is, had faith, that it was Jesus that doesn't just want to make people well, much less normal, but Jesus wants to raise people from the dead. Easter is now. Those poor healed, nine lepers go away, unsaved, precisely because they put their lives as lepers, as outcasts, as dead people behind them, and they went on to be merely normal. All those years of suffering and injustice and pain and ostracism, just gone. The healing for them began not when they were healed, even the Duke Medical Center can do that, but when Jesus met them and embraced them, all 10 of them, leprosy, outcastness, deadness and all, just as they were. And only one of them had faith to see, and so only one of them came back to say, thanks, Jesus, I needed that. 10 got healed, only one got saved. Jesus said, your faith, your relationship to my accepting, embracing, life-giving, extravagant love has healed you. Not your now clear, clean, white-washed skin, not your good, little, bible-believing, cleaned up boringly middle-class normality has saved you, no. I have saved you, just as you are. I am come, who seek and who save the lost. And for that, this Samaritan rightly said, thanks. And I know that even as I say that, I know that there've got to be people here this morning who have literally been brought back from death, to life. I know that, and I bet if we had time for a Methodist testimony this morning, you could tell us, it's just like Easter. Just before this story of the 10 lepers is the most familiar story in all the New Testament, the story of the Prodigal Son, it occurs right before this story. And you see that Prodigal Son coming back in from the far country, brushing off his rags, trying to get the pig slop off of his tie and attempting to kill the cheap perfume of harlots with Aqua Velva, desperate, just desperate to get normal. And he was memorizing this penitent, good, little, bad-boy confession speech, Father, I have sinned, I am no longer worthy to be called your son, just treat me as one of your hired servants. No, no, no, Father, I have seen the error in my ways. At last, I want to do right. I've done a lot of maturing during my sophomore year. I finally dropped out of the fraternity and... No, Dad, or Father, everybody makes mistakes, now I'm ready to come back home and be more like the older brother and now I'm ready to do my bit on the family farm and settle down and... But you remember, in that story, that the father just races out and he embraces the son. And before the boy gets a chance to say or do anything, or promise to do better or fly right, the father takes the son, on the only basis that the son could ever come home. That is, on the basis of the father's embracing, extravagant love. And you remember what the father shouted back to the people at the house? You remember the justification given for the party that was held there that night? My son, who was dead, is alive. Easter is now. And the son had to stuff those nice, little,

religious penitent speeches back in his grimy, little pockets. And the only speech he could make was, thanks. Of course, if the truth be known, that was the only speech that his stay-at-home, normal, older brother could have made. But the difference, I think, between the older brother and the younger boy, is that the younger one knew his dependency on the father, and the older one didn't. Therefore, it was the younger one who was able to say thanks. And for him, the party began; it was just like Easter. Where are the other nine? I remember this is the text that you always used at community thanksgiving services. And the preacher, where are the other nine? Where are the other nine? Why haven't they come back? Where are the other nine? Why aren't they leaping and shouting for joy, partying with the Father, having the time of their lives? Where are the other nine? Well, you know where they are, they're back at home, they're back to business as usual. Nothing more than normal now, skin all cleared up and clean, lives progressing along very nicely, thank you. And everything so utterly, boringly, normal. And we think, what a shame, to have met Jesus, the Easter Lord, the giver of life, the one who loves to take us and embrace us and celebrate with us and to have come away nothing but normal. What a shame to settle for Monday when we could have had Easter. What a shame to be out on that road toward death, and aren't we all? To have met Jesus, and to come away just healed, when we could've been saved. And I am betting that some of you know, or will know what this story is, in your own lives. I had a man in my church, he was the sort of person who would do anything for the church. You could call upon him, no job too difficult, too great, and he would always say yes. He was one of the top givers to the church, even though he was not a wealthy person. And one day, I asked him, how come you are just so extravagantly involved and giving? And he said to me, well, it's a long story, but at the beginning of my adult life, I realized I was an alcoholic. And my alcoholism led to other problems, and by the sheer grace of God, I got healed. And I never got over it. And then I realized that his whole life, you see, he had come back to give thanks, to have Easter. What a shame for most of us. But maybe there's a resurrection yesterday, Jesus being raised from the dead on Easter, or perhaps there is a resurrection sometime tomorrow, a future resurrection of the dead. But I don't think we'll ever feel deep, abiding thankfulness, nor will we ever really party until we stand face to face with Jesus and are given the eyes of faith to see, resurrection is today. (organ music begins) (congregation singing joins in)

- Lord, be with you

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. O, lamb of God, we come to you this morning just as we are, without one plea but that you died for us, and you have bid us to come. We come with our brokenness, our illness, our doubts, our fears, our sinfulness. We come just as we are, knowing that you will welcome, pardon, cleanse, and relieve us. We have believed your promises, and we come, trusting your love, to break every barrier down, to make us wholly your own. God of the healing touch, we lift up all those among us, all those listening on radio, or television, all those in our world who suffer the pain of illness, who suffer as outcasts in our society. We pray that they may be unfolded in your healing presence, and embraced by your saving grace. Heal their bodies, their minds, and their souls so that they may experience the fullness of life that only you make possible. God of transforming power, we also pray for our communities and for our world. Forgive us for treating brothers and sisters in need as outcasts. We are so afraid of our own mortality, that we would turn our eyes, our hands and our hearts from anyone who reminds us that we, too, must die. Yet, dear God, through Jesus

Christ, you have revealed your power to raise the dead. And in fleeing death, we often become the living dead. Heal us, from death to life. Give us the assurance of eternal life, so that we might live in the here and now as your resurrected people. And as a resurrected people, help us to touch one another with the same loving compassion that we have received from you. God of amazing grace, let us be among those who return to you with joy and thanksgiving. For when we receive your life-giving, saving power, we cannot help but be overcome with amazed gratitude. We have come, just as we are, and you have loved us, just as we are. Your unconditional acceptance allows us to see ourselves as whole. Your love enables us to see ourselves as your beloved children, and when we experience this, nothing is normal anymore. And we return to say thanks. Thanks to the God of embracing, extravagant love. Thanks to the God of amazing grace. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, amen. Let us show our gratitude by sharing our abundance with those in need. (organ music playing) (organ music fades as choir begins singing) (organ music resumes) (congregation singing joins in) Let us pray. O, God of amazing, extravagant love, before the gifts you have given us, our gifts pale into insignificance. And yet, we know that just as you accept us, though we be unworthy, you accept our gifts. Increase our vision, and enlarge our compassion that we might embrace our brothers and sisters in need, as you have embraced us. Receive these gifts in love, and use them and us to further your caring in the world, amen. Let us pray together with confidence, as the children of God. 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, amen. Let us go forth as a people who have been healed from death to life, through the amazing, extravagant love of our Lord and savior. May the love of God of the grace of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (choir sings in unison) (organ music begins)