

(lively organ music)

- In the absence of Reverend Brazal, I've been asked this morning to preside over the worship and my name is Hubert Beck as noted in the worship service. The preacher this morning as again you will note in the announcements is the Reverend Dr. Elizabeth Achtemeier. She's been a visiting professor of homilectics at various schools but presently is serving as you note in the bulletin as adjunct professor of Bible and Homilectics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. We welcome her and we're very happy to have her with us. The only other announcement I've been given is to remind you again of the Messiah which will be presented next weekend, again as noted in the bulletin as to where to obtain tickets and so on. Let us then turn to our order of worship and honor our Lord. Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the Earth.

(congregation mumbles) The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. (congregation mumbles) (lively organ music) (congregation sings) Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God whose will it is to restore all things to your beloved Son whom you anointed priest forever and sovereign of all creation, grant that all the people of the Earth now divided by the power of sin may be united under the glorious and gentle rule of your Son, Jesus Christ who lives and rules with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, amen.

- Let us pray the prayer for illumination.

- [Minister And Congregation] 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 Jeremiah, chapter 23, verses one through six. Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God is Israel concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people, it is you who have scattered my flock and have driven them away and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them and I will bring them back to their fold and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them and they shall not fear any longer or be dismayed nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety and this is the name by which he will be called, the Lord is our righteousness. This is the word of the Lord. (congregation mumbles)

- Will you kindly turn to the Canticle found on page 208, or it would be Hymn 208 in the Hymnal but we will read Luke chapter one verses 68 to 79. Will the congregation please rise. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel who has come to set the chosen people free. (congregation mumbles) Through the holy prophets, God promised of all to save us from our enemies from the hands of all who hate us. (congregation mumbles) This was the oath God swore to our Father Abraham to set us free. (congregation mumbles) And you, child shall

be called the prophet of the most high where you will go before the Lord to prepare the way. (congregation mumbles) In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us. (congregation mumbles) (lively organ music)

- The epistle reading from the letter to the Colossians. Chapter one versus 11 through 20. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience while joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation for in him all things in heaven and on Earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers, all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning, the first born from the dead so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on Earth or in heaven by making peace through the blood of his cross. This is the word of the Lord. (congregation mumbles) (inspirational church music)

- Before I read the New Testament lesson just let me say that it is always a pleasure and an honor for me to worship with you in this fine chapel. Our gospel lesson is taken from the 12th chapter of the gospel according to John beginning at the 20th verse. Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So, these came to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and said to him sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly I say to you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me and where I am, there shall be my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour, Father, glorify thy name. Then a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again. The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said an angel has spoken to him. Jesus answered, this voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out. And I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself. This is the word of the Lord. (congregation mumbles) It is the spring of the year in our scripture lesson. Two days before the feast of the Passover. Jerusalem is crowded with Jewish pilgrims all come to the holy city in accordance with the law to celebrate their principal sacred festival. That festival that reminded every Jew of Israel's exodus out of Egypt. Among the pious pilgrims are also Jesus and his disciples and they will shortly eat that Passover feast together in an upper room. Now, there had been great speculation among the Jewish crowds as to whether Jesus would show up at Passover at all. Four days earlier in Bethany he had raised Lazarus from the dead. And when the report of that final manifestation of Jesus' power had reached the Jewish chief priest and elders, they had decided that they simply had to get rid of the man. He was causing too much disturbance among the populace and that was liable to upset the Roman authorities and so, Jesus and his followers had hidden out in the wilderness for a few days. But now here we was openly mingling with the crowds. In fact, Jesus had even been acclimated by some of the Jews as their king when

he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. So, it is no wonder that the Pharisees muttered the whole world has gone after him and it is no wonder that some Greeks, some non-Jewish visitors to Jerusalem also wanted to see Jesus. Sir, we wish to see Jesus, the Greeks told the disciple Philip. Let us meet this wonderful man. We wish to see Jesus. I suppose that could be the request of all of us non-Jews too. Certainly some of us would make the request only out of curiosity to get a glimpse of this figure that the Christian church has been worshiping for almost 2,000 years. But others of us of course wish to see our Lord in order to fall in adoration at his feet. And some of us would probably like to ask him some questions about a loved one who has died, or about a sin that haunts us from the past or about the mystery of some suffering or loss. But whatever the reason, if we at this moment could see our Lord, we would expect him to be a glorious figure. Hollywood, of course, has always portrayed him with a symphony orchestra playing in the background. But it is not for nothing that our artists have depicted him with light surrounding him. How did the prophet Isaiah talk of that king of the Jews? Well, as wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace and if we could see our Lord, we would expect him to match that description. In short, you and I would like to see Jesus in all of his glory as the mighty Son of God and prince of peace indeed who can rule over all the nations and bring the warring madness of this wary world to an end or we would like to see Jesus as the glorious, wondrous counselor who could tell us the way to go when we don't know which way to turn, who could lend us wisdom and guidance in the decisions we have to make or could tell us how to solve our problems and how to figure out life's perplexing mysteries. Or is it an a companion and comforter that we would like to meet our Lord? Surely if we could just once encounter Jesus and know his presence with us, we would never be so achingly lonely again. Jesus would always be near us and understand and become the companion of our hearts. Perhaps he would even reach out and touch us and our pain would disappear. But surely his look would be one of forgiveness for those dark moments that we remember. In sorrow or suffering or hurt or loss his presence would heal and sustain and perhaps we would even find him avenging some of those unjustified hurts that we have suffered but certainly we would see him triumphant over all wrong and evil and death, standing there, calm in command, a victorious and glorious king. The reassuring development then in our scripture lesson is that Jesus agrees to our request. When those Greeks come saying to Philip, sir, we wish to see Jesus and Philip passes that message onto Andrew and Andrew tells our Lord, then Jesus replies, the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. In other words, in answer to our pleas to see our magnificent Lord, he accedes to our plea and replies to us yes, now you will see my glory. But we do not get back from that just quite what we expect. We and our Lord it seems have two different ideas of glory for when Jesus speaks in the gospel of John about manifesting his glory, he's not talking about appearing before us as a mighty, victorious, marvelous king. He is talking about dying on a cross. Now is my soul troubled, he says and what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour, Father, glorify thy name. Father, Father, he is saying in so many words, raise me up on that executioner's tree and we well might ask well, just what is so glorious about that? This is the Sunday in the church year that is known as the Sunday of Christ the King and so, let's look at this expected glorious ruler of ours very realistically for just a moment. Pilate puts it directly to us a little later in the story. His soldiers have spent a good part of the night abusing Jesus, whipping him and then putting a crown of thrones on his head and a purple robe on his bleeding shoulders. They have struck him repeatedly in the face and bowed down to him in mockery and scorn and now Pilate hauls that exhausted and beaten figure out before us and he says to us, here is your king. There is our glorious conquering king, good Christians. A criminal roughed up by the police. The one whom we would like to have rule the nations.

Powerless before the power of Rome. The man whom we want to ease our loneliness totally deserted by his friends. The healer to whom we pray to cure our diseases himself wounded and bleeding and thirsting or the comforter for all our troubles and losses himself troubled and certainly fearful. Someone once said that no one was so in need of pastoral care as was our Lord on those last days of his life. And so, yes, here is our glorious victor over evil and wrong and death himself about to die. The cross, as our scripture lesson is the glorification of Jesus. And given the portrayal that we have in the Passion story, we have to ask well, just what is so glorious about that? Well, certainly it is not unique simply as a torture story. We could match its horrors every day with tales from the prisons of Central America and China and Cambodia. And we must remember that the cross of Jesus was only one among three on the hill of Golgotha that spring afternoon. Rome crucified lots of criminals. Nor was Jesus the only young man to give his life for his cause. 1,000 crosses in Arlington National Cemetery mark the graves of those who died for freedom. Jesus was a good man, an innocent man to be sure but we could say that of countless heroes and martyrs of history and while there is a certain glory about giving one's life for what one loves, for country or friend or even enemies, such a sacrifice would not single out that cross of Calvary as especially unique or noteworthy. No, the cross of Jesus Christ is glorious because it manifests the glory of God. Father, glorify thy name, our Lord prays in our scripture lesson and the voice from heaven answers him, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again on that tree. That weak and bleeding and dying figure on Golgotha is a manifestation of the magnificence of Almighty God. For you see, the cross reveals the final truth about God that he wants to give you. He wants to give you eternal life. Tell me, what are the powers of death that surround and nibble away at your life these days? Some black and shadowy thing in the labyrinthian depths of your soul, certainly there is less and less that we cannot bring ourselves to do in our time, either as individuals or as a nation. And we have a hard time being naive anymore about anything. We have seen it all, haven't we? And yes, some of us have done it all. The scientist Loren Eiseley once told of the time in his childhood when he removed the cover from an old well and peered down a shaft of sunlight into its dark and slimy depths. There wrote Eiseley, secretive and underground and mysterious I saw passing assuredly and hurriedly into the darkness a spidery thing. A spidery thing of hair and many legs and I quickly set the routing cover of boards back into place with a shiver. Well, what is down there in your depths covered over with the insubstantial shield of education and good manners? The memory of some pitiful compromise or a temptation that you put in another person's way? Some delight in error and darkness when you knew very well what was right? Motives so mixed that they never could be called pure or self-deceiving pretensions of righteousness. Let's face it, friends, the evil we see in our world all around us starts first in the depths of our own hearts with our passionate claims just to be left alone and not have to bother about other people. With our lack of commitment to any community or any cause other than our own. With our indifference toward being good in a world where goodness is out of fashion. And so, we fritter away our God-given destiny in a whole series of bad choices and then we try to restore to our society by police coercion what we have lost by lack of morals and Christian values and we walk the path of darkness, friends straight into the jaws of death but in the middle of that way of darkness, God sets a cross with the light of his love streaming from the face of Jesus Christ and he thereby says to us, here is my will for you, I do not wish you to die. I do not wish you to suffer the consequences of all your selfishness and pride, I will not abandon you to your evil even though you abandoned me. I will not forgive you are my child though you often forget I am your father. No, no, God protests, but the cross rather than give you over to the death that your sin deserves, I will give up my only begotten son to die in your place because more than anything else in the world, beloved children, I want you to have abundant life. And that

desire of our God's, that love, that deed performed there on Calvary's hill, yes, that is glorious. But the cross is glorious for another reason. It shows forth the glory of God because it also manifests God's power. Do you really think that Pilate or the high priest Caiaphas or the blood-thirsty crowds or the soldiers of Rome were in control that day our Lord was crucified? No, our Lord said no one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord. God in Jesus Christ was fully in command that day his son freely chose to die and so, why should we think it is any different now? God is still in control of all those powers and principalities and rulers of this world before whom we become so fearful because we imagine that they are in charge of our own life and death. But did human evil have the last word at the cross of Christ? Or was God the victor over it? Then why do we think God can be defeated by the sin in our own hearts or by the wrong in the society around us? Was death the last word at Calvary? The grave the end of God's enterprise? Or was death itself defeated on that day that Christ our king cried out it is finished? What did he mean it is finished? What was finished? His life, your life, mine? No, death itself was finished on that day that our Lord willingly laid down his life for us. Do you remember the hymn? The strife is o'er, the battle done, the victory of life is won, the song of triumph has begun. The powers of death has done their worst but Christ their legions has dispersed, let shouts of holy joy outburst, hallelujah. Death is finished. God took your death, your sin, your faithlessness, your fear and he nailed them all to the cross of his Son and then he buried them there in that cold rock cave tomb in a garden. But on the first day of the week at daybreak he raised up his son triumphant over human wrong. And because of that resurrection we know that God not only desires that we live abundantly but we also know that he has the power to give us that abundant life both now and eternally. He showed forth that power in the death and resurrection of his son. And there never has been nor will there ever be a more sure manifestation of the glory of Almighty God. Now is the judgment of this world, our Lord said. Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out, death and evil with all their powers but not for us alone, good Christians, not for us alone. For our Lord says something else in the fourth gospel. He promised his disciples and I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself. And so, he is keeping that promise, isn't he? The light of his cross has streamed out into the darkness and is converting the world. It now can be found in a hut in Africa and in a palace in Great Britain. It is a symbol worn on a chain around thousands of necks and it is pinned to lapels and even scratched on buildings. Indeed, our scientists tell us that when Space Lab first orbited the Earth in November of 1983, they placed a symbol spelled out in pyrotechnic flares on the Greenwich Meridian. They wanted to demonstrate how signals could be sent to other creatures in outer space. But the symbol they formed with their lights was the shape of a cross. Now, to be sure that was probably coincidence and perhaps unintentional but nevertheless it was prophetic you see because there will indeed come a day when the Earth and all the universes in space will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea and that glory, friends, that glory of God will always have the shape of Christ's cross. Sir, we wish to see Jesus. We wish to see him in all his glory. If that is your wish in this sacred season, then go to Calvary. Forget about yourself, good Christian, forget about trying to protect and secure and save your own life for you cannot do it but God can and he has. He has done it in magnificent fashion. He has raised up his son on a cross and thereby manifested his love for us that simply wishes to give us life. He has defeated every power within our hearts and within our evil world, every power that wants to do us to death. He has begun a rule over this Earth that will never end until Christ has drawn all people to himself. That's the glory of God, good Christians there in the shape of that cross. And yes, there is abundant life for you. There from your king on that cross. Amen. (lively organ music) (congregation sings)

- Let us offer before God the needs and wants of our lives, the needs and wants of the world and thanksgiving to him who satisfies them all. In thanks we become before you, oh God remembering your grace and mercy in the midst of our need. Remembering your glory towering over all creation, remembering your footsteps marked in the history of our world and marked in a particular way in the history of your people, Israel from whom came your beloved son in whom we have hope and life everlasting. Lord, in your mercy, (congregation mumbles) guide the nation to the world into ways of justice, truth and peace, merciful ruler of the universe, establish among all people everywhere that peace which is the fruit of righteousness that they may foreshadow the peace of the eternal kingdom yet to be revealed. Lord, in your mercy, (congregation mumbles) especially guide those who are sent to maintain the peace in the Balkan countries, guide the discussions leading to peaceful transitions in the near East, bless rulers who seek the welfare of their nation and the world and make of our nation a leader in the causes of peace with justice, creating a climate from which will flow a common concern for the welfare of all people everywhere. Lord, in your mercy, (congregation mumbles) God of our salvation it is your revealed and expressed will that all people might come to you through your son Jesus Christ. Inspire our witness and the witness of your church wherever it is found across the face of the Earth, that our words may be filled with your presence that our life may reveal your love and that our hearts may be so grounded in you that men and women everywhere will seek to live in your presence and under your grace. Lord, in your mercy, (congregation mumbles) be with all who serve your church as laity and all who serve your church as professional workers. Let your blessing rest on all who follow you, give sound understanding of your word to your church. Lead your people into the ways of faithful living and give all a sincerity of purpose in serving you by means of serving the needy of the Earth. Lord, in your mercy, (congregation mumbles) lift up the fallen, oh God that they may again hold their heads high in the company of those around them, where that fallenness is due to sin, lead your children to repentance and faith by a gracious outpouring of your spirit, where that fallenness is due to injustices and wrongdoings in our midst, turn the oppressors from their wicked ways and give the fallen a new hope and direction, where that fallenness is due to sickness, distress and death, give healing, raise heads high to see your presence in their midst and give comfort in the face of death. Lord, in your mercy, (congregation mumbles) and so Lord, into your hands we commend all for whom we pray. We ask that you would take our conscious petitions into the loving care of your heart and hands and ask that you would act on those needs that have neither crossed our lips nor our attention for we acknowledge that you know us better than we know ourselves and we depend on you to do for us those things that even we do not know we need. All these things we bring before you in the name of Jesus Christ who has called us by the Holy Spirit to bring all our needs and wants before you in the complete confidence that you both hear and answer our cry. Amen and amen. Let us now lift our hearts and hands to God as we acknowledge the origin of all that we have to the sign of the offering now to be received, recognizing through them the rich and gracious outpouring of the divine hand in all that we own and all that sustains us. (lively inspirational music) (lively organ music) (congregation sings) From you, from your hand, oh, bountiful God has come all that we are, all that we hold in trust from you and all that sustains our life. To you, oh God, we offer these signs of our stewardship, these tokens of our love and these returned from our efforts of serving you. Use them, oh God, as a means of spreading among the needy of our community a visible word from you and your people for the sake of your word made flesh and appearing among us, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. It is he who taught us that we should gather our needs and wants and prayers and praises in the words, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Give

us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Amen. (lively organ music) (congregation sings) The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen. (lively organ music)