

(organ music) (lively organ music)

- Good morning and welcome to this service of worship at Duke University Chapel. A particular warm welcome to our alumni from the classes of 1941, 1951, and the Half Century Club who are having their reunion weekend with us. We also welcome back as our lector today Dr. Barney Jones, beloved professor of religion here at Duke for many years. Now, let us stand and join together in the greeting. (congregation shuffling) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- The risen Christ is with us.

Congregation: Praise the Lord. (organ music) ♪ I'll praise my Maker while I've breath ♪ ♪ And when my voice is lost in death ♪ ♪ Praise shall employ my nobler powers ♪ ♪ My days of praise shall ne'er be past ♪ ♪ While life and thought and being last ♪ ♪ Or immortality endures ♪ ♪ Happy are they whose hopes rely ♪ ♪ On Israel's God who made the sky ♪ ♪ And earth and seas with all their train ♪ ♪ Whose truth forever stands secure ♪ ♪ Who saves the oppressed and feeds the poor ♪ ♪ For none shall find God's promise vain ♪ ♪ The Lord pours eyesight on the blind ♪ ♪ The Lord supports the fainting mind ♪ ♪ And sends the laboring conscience peace ♪ ♪ God helps the stranger in distress ♪ ♪ The widow and the fatherless ♪ ♪ And grants the prisoner sweet release ♪ (organ music) ♪ I'll praise my God who lends me breath ♪ ♪ And when my voice is lost in death ♪ ♪ Praise shall employ my nobler powers ♪ ♪ My days of praise shall ne'er be past ♪ ♪ While life, and thought, and being last ♪ ♪ Or immortality endures ♪

- Let us pray. We have entered your chapel, O God, where there are memories of saints, messages of peace, imperatives of prophets, where death is overcome by resurrection, and the pain of living turns into redemption. Where sin is erased by grace, arrogance overcome by humility, and despair replaced with hope. We are here and you are waiting for us. Make it possible during our time of worship together to move closer to you and your will. Amen. You may be seated. (congregation shuffling) We're glad to see such an overflow crowd this morning. Unfortunately, we have run out of bulletins and ask that you share with one another.

- Let us pray.

All: 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 the book of Genesis. The same night, Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him

until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, Let me go, for the day is breaking, but Jacob said, I will not let you go, unless you bless me. So he said to him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob. Then the man said, You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed. Then Jacob asked him, Please tell me your name, but he said, Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved. The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. This is the word of God.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- Please stand and join in singing the psalm found on page 758 and 759. ♪ The Lord is my light and my salvation ♪ ♪ Whom shall I fear ♪ ♪ The Lord is the stronghold of my life ♪ ♪ Of whom shall I be afraid ♪ ♪ When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh ♪ ♪ My adversaries and foes shall stumble and fall ♪ ♪ Though they encamp against me ♪ ♪ My heart shall not fear ♪ ♪ Though war rise up against me ♪ ♪ Yet I will be confident ♪ ♪ One thing I asked of the Lord ♪ ♪ That will I seek after ♪ ♪ That I will dwell in the house of the Lord ♪ ♪ All the days of my life ♪ ♪ To behold the beauty of the Lord ♪ ♪ And to inquire in the temple. ♪ ♪ The Lord will hide me in His shelter ♪ ♪ In the day of trouble ♪ ♪ Will conceal me under the cover of His tent ♪ ♪ And will set me high up on a rock ♪ ♪ And now my head shall be lifted up ♪ ♪ Above my enemies all around me ♪ ♪ And I will offer sacrifices in the Lord's tent ♪ ♪ With shouts of joy ♪ ♪ I will sing and make melody to the Lord ♪ ♪ All glory be to you, O God ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ, our Savior ♪ ♪ And to the Holy Spirit, Blessed Trinity ♪ ♪ As it was since time begun ♪ ♪ It now and will be forevermore ♪

- This reading is from the gospel according to St. Mark. They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it, for He was teaching his disciples, saying to them, The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill Him, and three days after being killed, He will rise again, but they did not understand what He was saying and were afraid to ask Him. Then they came to Capernaum, and when He was in the house He asked them, What were you arguing about on the way? But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the 12, and said to them, Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all. Then He took a little child and put it among them and taking it in His arms, He said to them, Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God. ♪ O where shall wisdom be found ♪ ♪ Where, where shall wisdom be found ♪ ♪ And where is the place of understanding ♪ ♪ Where, where is the place of understanding ♪ ♪ Man knoweth not the price thereof ♪ ♪ It cannot be gotten for gold ♪ ♪ It cannot be gotten for gold ♪ ♪ Neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof ♪ ♪ Neither shall silver be weighed ♪ ♪ Be weighed for the price thereof ♪ ♪ God understandeth the way thereof ♪ ♪ God understandeth the way thereof ♪ ♪ And he knoweth the way thereof ♪ ♪ He knoweth, he knoweth the place thereof ♪ ♪ The fear of the Lord ♪ ♪ That, that is wisdom ♪ ♪ And to depart from evil ♪ ♪ That is understanding ♪ ♪ The fear of the Lord ♪ ♪ That, that is wisdom ♪ ♪ And to depart from evil ♪ ♪ That is understanding ♪ ♪ And to depart from evil ♪ ♪ That is

understanding ♪ ♪ Depart from evil ♪ ♪ Give us understanding ♪ (choir shuffling)

- If we recall, Jacob has spent a lot of time with Laban and he's now preparing to go and reconcile with Esau. The same night he got up and took his two wives and his two maids and his 11 children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and he sent them across the stream and likewise everything that he had, and Jacob was left alone, and a man, a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with the man, and then the man said, Let me go, for the day is breaking, and Jacob said, Not unless you bless me and the man said, What is your name? And Jacob said, Jacob, and the man said, You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and you have prevailed, and then Jacob asked him, Please tell me, what is your name? And the man said, Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him, and so Jacob called that place Peniel, saying, For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved. The sun rose on Jacob as he passed by Peniel, limping because of his hip. Thanks be to God.

- We have been following the story of our shadowy, primal progenitor Jacob. Life has been a struggle. While still in the womb, Jacob, locked in combat with his twin Esau, and when the time had come for Rebecca to give birth to the twins in her womb, Jacob came out of the womb clutching his brother's heel, and so they called him Jacob, which means Grabber, and the struggle continued. When they were young, Jacob duped his older brother Esau out of his birthright, selling his birthright for a bowl of stew, and when Jacob's father Isaac lay on his deathbed, blind and dying, Jacob tricked him into giving him that birthright that should have gone to Esau. Esau said he would kill him for doing that, and so Jacob has spent his whole adult life on the run, on the lam, and now this night he is finally and fearfully coming back home. He's at last coming back home to try to make peace with his brother, Esau. Tomorrow morning he's going to stand face to face with the brother whom he has so grievously wronged and we wonder, is this brother going to receive him or will this brother kill him, and who among us would blame Esau if it were the latter? So Jacob, in a gesture so typical for Jacob, sends on ahead his wives and his children on ahead of him across the river Jabbok as a kind of test balloon. Tomorrow if he hears their dying screams he will rethink the idea of reconciliation. But now it is night, and Jacob is alone, alone on the brook, beside the brook Jabbok. He is on that boundary between nowhere and home. He is on preparing to cross that rubicon between alienation and reunion. Alone, night, and it shall be a night to remember. For there, on the banks of the Jabbok, Jacob is assaulted by a stranger. Who is this stranger that jumped Jacob at night? Well, nobody knows. The text simply calls him a man, an "ish." A man wrestled with him until day. We're not told too much by the story. It's dark, shadowy, ambiguous. Some have wondered, is he wrestling with his brother, who's come across the river to get a headstart on him, locked there on the riverbank at midnight the same way they were locked in struggle in their mother's womb? Or maybe this is some demon, some primordial devil, that has resisted the rationalizing influence of the department of religion and has sort of come up there and jumped Jacob, something out of our dim, pagan past, or maybe it's some river god that just bubbled up out of the slime. The nocturnal antagonist has no name and we are never allowed to see his face, but by the end of that fitful night, Jacob will have become convinced that he has fought with God. We're gonna sing about it at the end of this sermon, a hymn by Charles Wesley. Fought with God. On Jacob's way to wrestle and to meet his brother, he is jumped by his God. Oh, but this is not the gracious God of the daylight who has blessed and

promised things to Jacob, promises to make a great people of him. No, no, this is a terrifying force of God at night, a God who's not going to be appeased by flowery phrases and prayers by Jacob, nor is this a god that's gonna be stared at, looked at, analyzed, picked apart like a cadaver on a table, discussed politely in religion classes. No, that night Jacob met, that night when Jacob feared more than anything the wrath of his brother, he must first endure the assault of his God. The fight lasted all night. It was almost an even match. Neither wrestler prevailed. Oh, what a man must have been this Jacob, to fight God and almost fight God to a draw, and what a God must be this God, willing to wrestle a man like Jacob. Near dawn, sweating, gasping for breath, exhausted by conflict, the combatants are reduced to speech. "Let me go, daylight is breaking," said the man. "Bless me first," says Jacob. Jacob was always in the market for a blessing. "Well, what's your name?" asked the stranger. "Jacob." "No, no, you're no longer called Jacob. You are Israel. You've struggled with God and with people, and you have prevailed." "Well, so what's your name?" Jacob asked the stranger. There was no reply. The stranger slipped out of his grasp and into the night. Jacob got no clear victory that night, no answer to his question, but what he got was a new name, and you know in a story anytime you get a new name, you get a new identity. Jacob got a new name through the assault of God. Now we have been taught in the story to call him by many names. Jacob, meaning Trickster, Grabber, worst of all Heel, but now he is going to be called Israel, which may mean God preserves, and in this new name there is new being and there is new power and that night, power shifted in God's relationship to the world. A new man, a new people got formed, called forth. Israel is the one who has faced God, been gripped by God, prevailed, gained a blessing, and been renamed. Though he never saw the face, so he never got a name, Jacob has been forever changed. The story begins in the early chapters of Genesis and it says that we want knowledge, we want to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. We want to know all the mysteries in heaven and earth. We want to pick apart creation and understand. We want to reduce all the universe to a bunch of formulae. We want to know God's name. We want to know God's name so we can ring God up anytime we please, have God do things for us. We want to see God's face so we can see if it's a kind face or if it maybe looks like our face. But no, there is no name and there is no face and there is no real knowledge except in ambiguity, only this unscrutable mystery and blessing. Israel comes into existence through the assault of an inscrutable God. See, I believe this dark, primitive story is a story about grace, but it's not grace the way we usually talk about it. It's not sweet, amazing grace. It's tough, assaulting grace. Nobody consulted Jacob about what he would like to be. When daylight comes, God is gone, but so is Jacob. Now, no one remains but Israel, walking with a permanent limp after a night of horrible sleep. And I ask you, that night, was Israel blessed or wounded by God? Sometimes God's nocturnal visits both bless and wound, both wound and bless. With tears in her eyes, she told the group about how, as a young girl, she had asked, she had prayed to God, God, use me for your purposes. When she was in college, she was struck down by a painful chronic illness. After college, a short and very unhappy marriage followed, but she gave birth to a child. That child was struck down on a playground accident. After six months of terrible agony, the child died. Now, later in life, she was running an inner-city day care center which she thought next week would close due to lack of funds. And somebody in the group said, "The big mistake you made was saying God, use me for your purposes." People, the story of Jacob's match with a stranger by the river depicts a god that's big and dark and pushy and real. Not the kind old gentlemen up in the sky, but an assaulting adversary by night. Got a postcard this summer from a Duke graduate out in the desert, protecting some Kurdish people. Postcard said he was out in the desert protecting these Kurdish people, this, that, and at the bottom he said, Oh by the way, I'm a Catholic now. I wrote him back. I said, Don't send me a postcard like

that. Just a little tantalizing here, there, and the other, and I'm a Catholic now, what is this? Have you had a change in direction in your life? Tell me about it. For this, I got a seven page single spaced typed letter. In the letter he said, have I had a change of direction in my life since I left Duke? I skidded 150 feet down the interstate, put on brakes, was thrown into reverse, drove across the median, and headed down the other side. Yeah, I've had a change in my life. I'm a Catholic now. Lusting to see God, wanting a name to name God, Jacob got wounded and blessed in the struggle. There are, it seems, no untroubled encounters with this God, this Holy God, so beware, beware. You heard it here first, beware. Late night, night before a meeting, or even a midterm, alone, you might get jumped, visited, wrestled to the ground, locked in struggle. You've been warned. Nobody walks away from such divine human wrestling without a limp and a new name. The nocturnal adversary comes and locks our lives in combat. We demand a name, we want to see a face, but no, no, no, no, no. The stranger names us. You, you are now Israel, and though we consider ourselves blessed, having struggled with God and lived to tell about it, we walk toward the dawn with a limp. (organ music) (shuffling) ♪ Come, O thou Traveller unknown ♪ ♪ Whom still I hold but cannot see ♪ ♪ My company before is gone ♪ ♪ And I am left alone with thee ♪ ♪ With thee all night I mean to stay ♪ ♪ And wrestle till the break of day ♪ ♪ With thee all night I mean to stay ♪ ♪ And wrestle till the break of day ♪ ♪ I need not tell thee who I am ♪ ♪ My misery or sin declare ♪ ♪ Thyself hast called me by my name ♪ ♪ Look on thy hands, and read it there ♪ ♪ But who, I ask thee, who art thou ♪ ♪ Tell me thy name, and tell me now ♪ ♪ But who, I ask thee, who art thou ♪ ♪ Tell me thy name, and tell me now ♪ ♪ Yield to me now, for I am weak ♪ ♪ But confident in self-despair ♪ ♪ Speak to my heart, in blessings speak ♪ ♪ Be conquered by my instant prayer ♪ ♪ Speak, or thou never hence shalt move ♪ ♪ And tell me if thy name is Love ♪ ♪ Speak, or thou never hence shalt move ♪ ♪ And tell me if thy name is Love ♪ ♪ 'Tis Love, 'tis love, thou diedst for me ♪ ♪ I hear thy whisper in my heart ♪ ♪ The morning breaks, the shadows flee ♪ ♪ Pure universal Love thou art ♪ ♪ To me, to all, thy mercies move ♪ ♪ Thy nature and thy name is Love ♪ ♪ To me, to all, thy mercies move ♪ ♪ Thy nature and thy name is Love ♪

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. O God, as we pray together, make yourself known to us. If we have doubts, help us not to fear them, but rather help us to find your presence in the ache of our uncertainty. If we have question, relieve us of the burning need always to find immediate answers and help us to understand that in the darkness of things unknown, it is easier to discover a flicker of light. Lord, in your mercy.

All: Hear our prayer.

- O God of the struggle, some of us are wrestling with you or with some person or problem in our life. Some of us are trying to make sense and find our way through illness, addiction, or a troubled relationship. Some of us are trying to find meaning and hope because we've become the victims of senseless violence. Some of us are struggling to determine our life direction, trying to discern our life's purpose in the midst of claims made by family, friends, and society, and some of us have felt the touch of your claim upon us but like Jacob we hope to bend you to our will and grab the blessing we desire from you, but we have seen that though you

often bless us, you also weaned us in the process and though you heal, you do not protect us from life's pain and trials. O God, give us courage to face life and faith to trust that you use every experience of life to mold us to your will and your purposes. Remind us that all things work to good for those who love you. Help us turn toward you and be blessed with a new name and a new understanding of life. Lord, in your mercy.

All: Hear our prayer.

- O God of all people, we lift up to you our concerns for a trouble world. An old order is dying and a new world has yet to be born. We have felt great fear at the uncertainty of the future. Ethnic peoples wrestle with other ethnic people. Nation struggles against nation, and with each passing day, understanding and peace seems more elusive. O God, we pray that you will enter into the struggle and claim it for your own, that out of the pain of conflict a new world of peace might be born. Lord, in your mercy.

All: Hear our prayer.

- O God of power, save us from a sense of helplessness as we face the overwhelming needs and demands of our world. Remind us that we do not struggle alone, but that indeed in the midst of the struggle you are there, claiming it, redeeming it for your own. Speak to us and show each of us the part you would have us play in your mission of recreating the earth. Cleanse us from all that keeps us from serving you and loving our neighbors and integrity of word and deed. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen. As the days become cooler and the leaves of summer begin to wear their fall colors, we are reminded of the many ways God interacts with the world to meet its many needs. The cycle of life goes on and we are among the actors, because we are created in God's image and given the task of stewardship. Let us now share in that responsibility as we set aside a portion of our wealth to play our part as caretakers in God's creation. (organ music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Methinks I hear the full celestial choir ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Methinks I hear the full celestial choir ♪ ♪ Through heav'ns high dome, through heav'ns high dome ♪ ♪ Their awesome, awesome anthem raise ♪ ♪ Now chanting clear ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Now chanting clear, chanting clear ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Now chanting clear ♪ ♪ And now they all conspire ♪ ♪ And now they all conspire ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Methinks I hear the full celestial choir ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Now chanting clear, chanting clear ♪ ♪ Chanting clear, chanting clear ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ And now they all conspire ♪ ♪ And now they all conspire ♪ ♪ To swell the lofty, lofty hymn from praise to praise ♪ ♪ To swell the lofty hymn from praise to praise ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ To swell the lofty hymn, to swell the lofty hymn ♪ ♪ To swell the lofty hymn, to swell the lofty lofty hymn ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Obey him, obey him, obey him, obey him ♪ (lively organ music) ♪ Praise God, from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise God, all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Praise God above, ye heav'nly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Let us pray. Almighty and merciful God, from whom comes all good and every perfect gift, we praise you for your mercy, for your goodness that has created us, your grace that has sustained us, your discipline that has corrected us, your patience that has borne with us, and your love that has redeemed us. Help us to love you and be thankful for all your gifts, even though they sometimes wound us. By serving you and delighting to do your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray.

All: 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 that 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.

- Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord be kind and gracious to you. May the Lord look upon with favor and give you peace. ♪ Amen, Amen ♪ ♪ Amen, Amen ♪ (organ music) ♪ Standing on the promises of Christ my King ♪ ♪ Through eternal ages let his praises ring ♪ ♪ Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God my Savior ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ I'm standing on the promises of God ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises that cannot fail ♪ ♪ When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail ♪ ♪ By the living Word of God I shall prevail ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God my Savior ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ I'm standing on the promises of God ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord ♪ ♪ Bound to him eternally by love's strong cord ♪ ♪ Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God my Savior ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ I'm standing on the promises of God ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises I cannot fall ♪ ♪ Listening every moment to the Spirit's call ♪ ♪ Resting in my Savior as my all in all ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ Standing on the promises of God my Savior ♪ ♪ Standing, standing ♪ ♪ I'm standing on the promises of God ♪ (organ music) (congregation mumbling)