

Woman: Sunday worship service, April 27th 1980, Duke chapel. (somber organ music) (rhythmic organ music) (somber organ music) (Choir singing) (rhythmic organ music) (choir singing) (organ drowns out singing)

Woman: I welcome you and I greet you today in all mighty God. Who has made us, who saves us and who continues to be with us. In order that we prepare ourselves to offer heart felt praise and thanksgiving. Let us confess our sins and accept God's forgiveness, let us pray. (clears throat) Oh Lord, holy and righteous God, we acknowledge before thy that we do not fear thy and that we do not love thy above all things. We do not delight in prayer, nor take pleasure in thy word. We do not really love our neighbor, we lack the consonance that should accompany our Christian profession. Our hearts are divided. Crossed by doubts and guilty desires, we accuse ourselves before thy oh God. We employ thy who's nature and who's name is love, to forgive us and in forgiving to heal us so that in our lives something will finally be changed. Amen. Let us confess in silence, our personal sins. (coughing) Friends, here and believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven, let us forgive one another. Let us give thanks, for God is good and Gods love is ever lasting. Thanks be to God, by whose love we have been made. Thanks be to God, by whose grace we have been made whole. Thanks be to God, by whose resurrection we are promised life ever lasting. Amen. I think it not inappropriate today in this time of accounting, accounting why students have learned and what professors have taught, that we wish all of you well. You are engaged in the enterprise of examinations and final papers. We welcome to the pulpit today the reverend B. Maurice Richie, assistant dean for field education and student services in the divinity school. We await with eagerness the message that he will bring to us.

Woman: Let us pray. Prepare our hearts, oh Lord. To accept your word, silence in us any voice but your own. That hearing we may also obey your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. The new testament lesson is from acts chapter 13, verses 14 through 16 and 26 through 39. But they passed from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia and on the sabbath day they went in through the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say it. So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, brethren, sons of the family of Abraham and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers because they did not recognize him, nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath fulfill these by condemning him. Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death. Yet they asked pilot to have him killed and when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people and we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus. As also it is written in the second Psalm. Thou art my son, today I have begotten thy and as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption. He spoke in this way, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of

David. Therefore he says also, in another Psalm, Thou wilt not let thy holy ones see corruption. For David, after he had served the council of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption. But he whom God raised up, saw no corruption. Let it be known to you therefore brethren, that through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and by him everyone that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. The apostle lesson is from Revelation, chapter 7, verses 9 through 17. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nations, from all tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb and all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, Amen, Blessing and glory and wisdom, and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Then one of the elders addressed me saying Who are these clothed in white robes, and wensst did they come from? I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they who come out of the great tribulation, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presents. They shall neither hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. The sun shall not strike them, nor any heat for the Lamb in the midst of the throne will shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Here ends the reading from the apostle, amen. (calming instrumental music) (choir vocalizing) (choir singing) Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the gospel lesson? The gospel lesson is form John, chapter 10, verses 22 through 30. It was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon's. So the Jews gathered round him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe. The works I do in my Fathers name, they be a witness to me, but you do not believe because you do not belong my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one. (rhythmic organ music) (choir singing) (organ drowns out singing)

Maurice: The public worship services of this chapel have always been meaningful to me and therefore it is a special pleasure for me to have a part in the leadership of today's service. The last book of the bible, the revelation to John of Patmos. Is a frequently midline and misunderstood book. For most persons it is perhaps the most difficult slice of scripture to grasps. Consequently it receives little attention from the more literate christian public. This fact makes all the more curious my personal history with this graphic piece of religious literature. From my childhood comes a stream of memories of things religious, one of these was the old testament stories my mother read to me from a thick, blue back collection of bible stories for children, as we sat together on the sofa of our living room. Another is perhaps more vivid because of the near terror it struck in my young heart. Often we children sat with various members of our extended family as they talked in aunt Mayfields living room. To help you appreciate the scene, I shall have to describe the setting. Aunt Mayfield and uncle Fred lived with their four children in a four room bungalow across the street from us. For several years uncle Fred was in the South Pacific with the United States Navy. The living

room where we sat was dark because it was small, with only two tiny windows but it was also dark because the walls were not ordinary walls, they were from corner to corner and floor to ceiling, real life scenes, in oil, of a South Pacific island, including everything but the bare breasted natives. We were much too pious for bare breasted natives. This lovely work of art had been provided by another member of the larger family, uncle Hen Nouse. Who with his two young daughters, had died of tuberculosis only a very few years before. How often the adults sat there in that dark room, eating, dipping their snuff, entering into their extensive debates over the books of Daniel and revelation. With a son and a husband in the South Pacific in World War II, aunt Mayfield's concern was greater than speculative theology, eschatology or apocalypticism. She had high personal stakes. Besides that she probably suffered a rather guilty conscience over who knows what but in those discussions emerged certain questions, who is the beast in revelation? Who the anti Christ? Who the great harlot? And I can approximately date my memories from some of their interpretations. In the earlier days Adolf Hitler was the anti Christ, then Joseph Stalin assumed that role. Sometimes in addition to or quite separately from Mao Tse-Tung. As time rolled on things became more obscure and more confused, perhaps the anti Christ was a nation and not a person? Or a movement? Communism, perhaps? It is testimony to the power of John's images that the superficially simple persons, cotton mill workers, a plumber, a seamstress, with their elementary educations sat around trying to locate themselves, if not in God's history, then certainly in John's grand scheme of things. What is God up to in history? And what does this mean for us? Is the end near? Yesterday morning during a morning Harold carried an associated press article reporting that a new generation has taken up aunt Hazel and aunt Mayfield's debate. Pat Robertson and his 700 Club sent their 250,000 members a leaflet recently suggesting that the anti Christ will be a young world dictator rising out of a new Rome. The 10 nations of the European common market. The article says, given the current European disdain for both the Christian gospel and the nation of Israel, it is not hard to imagine parts of the book of revelation coming to pass in the 1980's. Hal Lindsey who's book entitled "The late great planet Earth" sold more than any book published in the 70's, agrees with Robertson and his crowd. Needless to say the Washington office of the European economic community chose not to comment on any of these speculations. Even these interpretations still point to the contemporary power of revelation. It is a book, difficult, uneven, complex, which deserves to be taken seriously by the community of faith. In our own community both Dr. James Price of the department of religion and Dr. James M Eford of the divinity school have written on it. The events of the last few days have brought many of us to envision a world of catastrophic, not unlike those depicted by John in his book. Among the earthquakes, winds and fires, the harlot, dragons and beast. The choir of angels and elders and heavenly anthems. Is there a word of the Lord for an Easter tide celebration in Duke chapel? Before we look at the specifics of the 7th chapter, let us first remember John's specific situation. He tells us he is involuntarily on the island of Patmos, a tiny island of the Eastern Mediterranean because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. In other words John was an exile for religious reason. The churches of western Asia minor to whom he is writing are a mixture of strength and weakness, faithfulness and unfaithfulness. What will be their future at the hands of the Roman imperial pressure to bow down and give a obeisance to the Gods of Rome? Some have already capitulated says John, eating meat offered to idols and entering into ceremonies basically in conflict with Christian faith. Others as John of Patmos himself, had refused obeisance and had suffered torture, death or exile. The future John envisions for the struggle is on the level, on the one level bleak. The forces of evil will slowly build until by the end of history there will be a mighty conflict between the forces for righteousness and the forces of evil. In the 7th chapter John brings us to stand before that final moment. As the forces for evil

mount and the nature calamities multiply, who indeed can stand? John sees God sealing his faithful ones before the calamities fall. The church is assured that all through the increasing terrors of the last days, the merciful union of believes with their heavenly lord, will never cease, no, not for one moment. Even in this darkest moment of life in this world, God is faithful and active among his people to assure their union with him. He remains King and Lord of history. From the motley mixture of these seven churches through the calamities of the end times stream the thousands upon thousands of faithful to the throne of God and his land. The victors' song is not of their great feats of faith, it is rather salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the lamb. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, in honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. So it is those who kept the faith, who stand before the throne of God robed in the victors garb of white. It is they who are sheltered with God's presence, safe beyond the reach of a natural human calamities of this world. Safe because of their own heroics? No. Safe because of their own strength? No. Safe because of their own cunning? No. Safe because of their faith? Which has joined them to the one who sits upon the throne, the alpha and the omega, the almighty, the one who is and who was and who is to come. These have come out to the great tribulation because they died and rose with Christ the lamb. Even the terrible sufferings of the catastrophic last days of the end of time, can not stop the triumphal prepossession of the redeemed. God has called and gathered and enlightened the elect and God has the power to keep them in Christ to the end. Out of the eating and the talking and the dipping and the praying that went on in Mayfield's living room, came a strong sense of the judgment of God. I felt the terror of impending mysterious events and the awesome and frightful judgment of God implicit in the havoc that might come. The thrust of a great deal of the conversation was repentance, get ready, the forces of evil are mounting, disaster looms and that is indeed true to one part of John's vision. But equally if not much more significant theme is the one handle immortalized in Messiah, the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall rain forever and ever, the victory for John is sure. God rains and will rain and in his rule, he throws over is own people, the tabernacle of redemptive presence. In the 7th chapter, God has seen the faithful ones through the disasters and the calamities of the world and brought them into his own presence, where hunger, thirst and the hot sun of the Middle East can touch them no more. As Han Leagues said a generation ago, in the 7th chapter, the door of heaven is open and a ray of future glory falls upon the world in it's sorrow and in it's pain. If the rescue effort is attempted again in Iran, if the world teeters in these days on the brink of nuclear catastrophe, if empires rise and fall, old orders fade and news remain elusive, let us sing with John of Patmos, salvation belongs to our God. He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps, Jesus is raised up, not to leave us but to impel us with his Resurrection and to proceed and beckon us to himself by the throne of the almighty one. Our God has invited us into his very own life and by faith, neither life nor death, nor powers, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come will separate us form Gods love, in Christ Jesus, our Lord. To him be glory, dominion, honor, power and might, today and forevermore, amen. (uplifting organ music) (choir singing)

(organ drowns out singing)

Woman: Let us affirm what we believe, we believe in God, who has created and is created. Who has come in the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new. Who works in us and others by the spirit. We trust God, who calls us to be the church to celebrate life and it's fullness. To love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil. To proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us, we are not alone, thanks be to God, the Lord be with you. Let us pray. Holy and mighty

God, we thank you that by the spirit and power of love, you are always reforming the church and reforming us so that church and people are resorted to their rightful image, your image. We thank you that we do not need to wonder what you God are like, for we know of your majesty and of your servant hood in Jesus Christ. We thank you that in Jesus you have wrapped us up in love and that you have been willing to get wrapped up in us. We are thankful for Jesus Christ, who joins us in poverty and spirit to be able to lead us into the kingdom of spiritual richness. Who mourns for us when we are lost, who is mighty and meekness to temper our pride. Who is righteous as our example. Merciful to forgive our sin, pure of motivation to direct our lives. A peace maker to keep us together and who is the persecuted Lord, suffering to save us from ourselves. We rejoice and are glad oh God, that through Christ we belong to you. Here we stand, we can be no other but yours and as yours, we offer prayers for ourselves, the church and our world. We know that people in the world are hungry and have no shelter and have great need of much that we have. We know people are in prison, many times unjustly so and we know that people suffer from loneliness and neglect. We know that we stand by and allow things to happen to people in places all over the world, when we are apathetic and don't get involved in anyway in procedures of government and big business and in the admits of our attempting to do nothing, oh God, we pray for ourselves. We are part of a world wide church, apart of the body of Christ. Whose efforts at being the body are lacking sadly at best, whose attempts at doing your will many times become ensnared in power plays and fights for money and we don't know how to set examples and we don't want to give up what we have. In this tiny corner, where we in this congregation live and work, we look around us and see the needs and we talk about them but not many of us are motivated to do very much and so in amidst of holding on to who we are and what we have, oh God, we pray for ourselves. And we look at ourselves in this congregation and community with one another, we smile at our friends and we don't meet the eyes of those who have displeased us and we are resentful towards some persons and we talk about being Christians, and hate to admit, God, that we don't always like what your word says to us about who we should be and what we should do. And so we pray for ourselves, even when we probably don't intend to change very much but we dare to pray, knowing that you love even us. In the mist of praying for ourselves we pause to remember those who are sick, may our ministry to them be your ministry of healing. We remember those who grieve, may we through you bring comfort and love to them. To those who are lonely and afraid or in special need, may our awareness be increased and our presence in caring for them in your name be made known. May we rejoice with those who know special joice and to the leaders of this nation, may our message be one of peace. We do most earnestly pray for your guidance of those how lead us, to the hostages in Iran may our ministry be one of concern and caring and prayer for their safe release. May your word of peace come also to those who hold them captive. All these concerns we voice and those hidden deep within our hearts, we pray in the name of our savor, Jesus Christ to teaches us to say together, 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 thym is the kingdom and the power and the glory, amen. (uplifting organ music) (intense organ music) (choir singing) (organ drowns out singing) (rhythmic organ music) (choir singing) (organ drowns out singing)

Woman: We give thanks to you mighty God for your gift of life and love and we offer back to you a portion of what you have given us. Guide it's use for your work in this place, we offer again with these gifts ourselves.

Accept us and point us in the way of your service, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and savior, amen. (uplifting organ music) (choir singing)

(organ drowns out singing) Let us go from this place remembering that Jesus is our Lord, that we are Gods people. We are loved, we are forgiven, we have been taught, we have declared our intentions and we know our responsibilities. Let us now scatter into the world to live as free and responsible people in Christ and may the peace and joy of God almighty, creator, son and holy spirit go with us all. (choir vocalizing)  
(uplifting organ music)