

- Good morning. I'd like to welcome you to Duke Chapel. We're blessed this morning to have Dr. Cynthia Hale as our guest preacher. Dr. Hale is the founding pastor of the Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia. She is a native of Roanoke, Virginia and has degrees from Hollands College, a master of divinity from Duke Divinity School and a doctor of ministry from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. We're also pleased to welcome her mother and sister who are here with her today, and hope you'll take a time after the service to greet them. I wanna say a word of thanks to Gary Scott who is our elector, he is a Duke Divinity School student and also our guest organist today is Mr. Andrew Unsworth. Now let us continue with the call to worship. Please stand. Good and upright is the Lord. (congregation speaking) God leads the humble in what is right. (congregation speaking) (traditional Catholic music) (congregation and choir singing) 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. Helps us explore the depths of faith and heights of possibility. Help us open ourselves to you 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 the prayer for illumination. Open our hearts and minds oh God, by the power of your holy spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed we may hear your message with joy this day, amen. The old testament reading is from the book of Genesis, chapter 25, verses 19 through 34. Hear the word of the Lord. These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham was the father of Isaac and Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Labanm the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer and his wife, Rebekah, conceived. The children struggled together within her and she said, if it is to be this way, why do I live? So she went to inquire of the Lord and the Lord said to her, two nations are in your womb and two people's born of you shall be divided. The one shall be stronger than the other. The elder shall serve the younger. When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle. So they called him Esau. Afterward, his brother came out with his hand gripping Esau's heel, so he was named Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field while Jacob was a quiet man living in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he was fond of game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, let me eat some of that red stuff for I am famished. Therefore he was called Edom. Jacob said, first sell me your birth right. Esau said, I'm about to die. Of what use is a birth right to me? Jacob said, swear to me first, so he swore to him and sold his birth right to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew and he ate and he drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birth right. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

- This morning's salter is Psalm 25, verses one through 10, found on page 756 and 757 in your hymnal. Please stand and sing the salter and glory responsibly. ♪ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul ♪ ♪ Oh my God, in you I trust ♪ ♪ Let me not be put to shame ♪ ♪ Let not my enemies exult over me ♪ ♪ Let none that wait for

you be put to shame ♪ ♪ They shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous ♪ ♪ Make me to know your ways O Lord ♪ ♪ Teach me your paths ♪ ♪ Lead me in you truth and teach me ♪ ♪ For you are the God of my salvation ♪ ♪ For you are I wait all the day long ♪ ♪ Be mindful of your mercy O Lord ♪ ♪ And of your steadfast love ♪ ♪ For they have been from of old ♪ ♪ Remember not the sins of my youth ♪ ♪ Or my transgressions ♪ ♪ According to your steadfast love remember me ♪ ♪ For the sake of your goodness, O Lord ♪ ♪ Good and upright is the Lord ♪ ♪ Therefor the Lord instructs sinners in the way ♪ ♪ And leads the humble in what is right ♪ ♪ And teaches them their ways ♪ ♪ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast ♪ ♪ Love and faithfulness ♪ ♪ For those who keep his covenant and testimonies ♪ ♪ All glory to be to you creator ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ our savior ♪ ♪ And to the holy spirit let us be ♪ ♪ As it was their time began ♪ ♪ Is now and ever be forever more. ♪

- You may be seated.

- The second reading is from the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 13, verses one through nine and 18 through 23. Hear the word of the Lord. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many thing in parables saying, "Listen a sower went out to sow and as he sowed "some some seeds fell on the path and the birds "came and ate them up. "Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not "have much soil and they sprang up quickly "since they had no depth of soil. "But when the sun rose, they were scorched, "since the had no root, they withered away. "Other seeds fell among thorns and the thorns "grew up and choked them. "Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, "some a hundred fold, some 60, some 30. "Let anyone with ears listen." Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart. This is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while. And when trouble and persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understand it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundred fold, in another 60, in another 30. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

(choir singing)

- The third lesson is take from Paul's letter to the church at Rome. The eighth chapter, beginning with the first verse. Therefore there us now now condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Chirst Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do and that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful men and women to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin and sinful man and women in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according the sinful nature, but according the spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires. But those who live in accordance with the spirit have their mind set on what the spirit desires. Mind of sinful persons is death. But the mind controlled by the spirit is life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful

nature cannot please God. You however are not controlled by the sinful nature, but by the spirit if the spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he or she does not belong to Christ because if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal body, through his spirit who lives in you. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- My precious brothers and sisters, what a joy it is for me to be here with you standing tall on the platform that some short person must use regularly on Sunday morning. I don't know if you saw me processing down the aisle, but I am six feet tall and I don't need Will Williman's platform. My gracious hostess, Debra Brazzel and Gary Scott, the members of the choir, the members of the congregation, my brothers and sisters in Christ, those who are not and maybe want to be, those who are not and don't want to be, those who just came to church this morning because it's the thing to do. I really am delighted to be with you and share the word of our God with you. If you will permit me, I'd like to continue reading just another portion in Romans the eighth chapter. I got excited when I read it and I decided I wanted to preach from the whole chapter, but I promise I won't take more than 15 or 20 minutes. I understand if you preach too long, people begin to get antsy. In the 28th and 30th verses, we find these words. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God and have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the first born among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called and those he called he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified. Pray with me. God, thank you for this word and for this sweet opportunity to preach. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be found acceptable in thy sight because you alone, oh God, are our strength and our redeemer, amen. Over the last couple of years it seems that my life has been inundated with crisis, one right after the other. You've heard the saying, when it rains it pours, and I tell you the truth, it's been raining cats and dogs in my world. Just as soon as I'd recover from one thing something new would pop up. Every time I thought I had it all together again, something new would come unglued. You know what I mean? In the midst of all the craziness, I tried to remain cool, calm, and collected, but inside of me a volcano of uncontrollable emotions was surging up and erupting and sometimes in the middle of the day I felt like exploding in fit of frustration. Or in the middle of the night, I would wake up crying out to God, where are you? Have you forgotten about me? I thought you loved me, why is all this happening to me? And God would reply in God's calm and cool way, I've got you covered. It's all under control and you know that. I do, I retorted. Somehow it doesn't feel like. All hell is breaking loose in my life and you say you've got it all under control. You call this control? It feels like any moment with all the pressures that I am going through, my life will self destruct. Why is all this happening to me? Again God would quietly say, "Cynthia, you know that it's not just happening to you. "You know that because of the original sin "that's in the world and because of all that's happening "through the evil that the creation that I "originally created, good is now groaning "as a woman in the pain of childbirth, "waiting to be delivered from its bondage to decay. "You know that not only creation, but all persons, "especially Christians are groaning also "because of the suffering that is inherent in life. "You know that in this world we shall have troubles." Jesus made that quite clear, but he also said be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. You're right God, I do know that. We all know that suffering and pain and frustration that goes along with them are

all a part of life. And we know that life isn't easy. As a matter of fact, sometimes life can be downright hard. There are times in our lives when it seems that the darkness will never end. The trials won't stop coming. The frustrations won't stop growing and the tears just won't stop flowing. But we also know that God works together in all things for the good of those who love God and are called according to God's purpose. We know that, don't we? How many times we have read, heard, or quoted this verse and its promise. But isn't it interesting how we can read, hear, or even quote the promises of God to comfort, encourage, and give all of us blessed assurance and then yet fail to claim its promise in our lives so that we can live victoriously. Why do we continue to go through these emotional ups and downs every time some new trouble comes in our lives. When Paul wrote this promise, an affirmation of the sovereignty and providence of our God to the saints in Rome, he wrote it as a part of a powerful letter in which he makes clear our position as persons in Christ. This eighth chapter of Romans is for Paul, the Christian's declaration of freedom. In it he affirms four freedoms that we experience that we are privileged to have as Christians. Paul began this chapter by declaring that we are free from condemnation. Didn't you hear it when I read it? Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus we have been set free from the law of sin and death. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, those of you who have accepted him as our personal Lord and savior have been forgiven of our sins and set free from the guilt and shame of our past deeds. And even the penalty of sin, death. We are free from condemnation. We have been justified, declared righteous. Once we were sinners, persons who were guilty, but God and God's love and grace have now made us righteous. We have been made right with God and reconciled. No condemnation, nobody can tell us I remember what you did 10 years ago. It's forgiven, it's forgotten, it's over. No condemnation. Paul goes on to say that not only are we free from condemnation, but we are also free from any obligation to live according to the flesh. Romans 8:12 says, therefore brothers and sisters we have no obligation, we have an obligation, but it is not to the sinful nature to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die. But if by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Once we were powerless. Helplessly, hopelessly enslaved to do whatever our sinful nature, our flesh desired and demanded. Now we live no longer according to the flesh. We have been set free, not only from the penalty of sin, but the power of sin in our lives. There is no obligation to live according to the sinful nature because the spirit of Christ lives in us. It's the spirit that helps us to say no to those things that displease God. It's the spirit that helps us to make the right decisions and the right choices. It's the spirit that helps us to do the right thing. Being in Christ sets us free from condemnation and from obligation to sin, but it also sets us free from frustration. The frustration that comes from the trials and troubles of life. Freedom from frustration is as real as freedom from condemnation and no obligation to sin, is in our lives as Christians. Just as we have victory over sin and death, we have victory over frustration and those things that cause us to be frustrated. I think some of us believe that as long as we are in the world experiencing pain and suffering that frustration is to be a natural part of our lives. Not so, frustration is a choice. You can choose to be frustrated or not. Frustration is detention, the anxiety, the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that we feel when we aren't sure what is happening to us, why it is happening and what the outcome will be. Frustration happens when we are all alone and feel that no one cares that we are in the situation we find ourselves in. We feel frustrated when we feel we have no control over what's happening in our lives. It's frustrating, you know, when you or someone else you love is addicted, has cancer, AIDS or is HIV positive. It's frustrating watching your children continually make dumb decisions, seemingly wasting or ruining their lives when you invested so much in them. On the other hand, it's frustrating dealing with parents who are usually unreasonable and

won't hear another perspective. It's frustrating, isn't it, dealing with the aging process. Not being as vital or as virile as you used to be. Having to deal with physical and emotional challenges that only a few years ago you didn't even think about. It's frustrating when you lose your job and you're not sure where your next check is coming from. You're not sure whether or not you're even gonna be able to get another job given your age or experience or the circumstances of your removal. It's frustrating being single and living alone when you want to be married. Living alone, cooking and cleaning for one, renting movies, popping popcorn for one. Taking out the trash, bringing in the groceries and mail for one. On the other hand some of y'all are frustrated because you're married and you wanna be single. It's always greener on the other side.

Frustration comes when you're not sure what's happening to you and it seems like everything is out of control. You try to pray but you don't even know what to say. When you manage to get a few words out, it feels like it only goes to the top of the ceiling, but Paul says that even when we don't know what to pray, the spirit that lives in us is interceding for us, speaking in words that we cannot understand. You see though we may not understand what's happening in our lives, but the holy spirit does. And the spirit knows what to pray for because the spirit also know the will of God for our lives. And when we can't pray, when you've got the spirit living in you, the spirit is praying on your behalf. We may not know what's happening to us and why. We may not know what to say to God and what to pray for, but we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. Now when Paul wrote this verse, he wasn't engaging in some endeavor to impress people with his fortitude. Paul was writing out of his own personal experience of pain and suffering. Paul was intimately acquainted with pain and suffering. He was no stranger to challenges, but notice that Paul doesn't take this occasion to chronicle his challenges to show us awful life has been for him. Sometimes some of us become so obsessed with what we've gone through or what we are going through that we fail to recognize or remember that our experiences may have some redemptive purpose for us. Paul in this instance is focusing not on the pain, but on the gain. In all things, everything, anything. God works for the good of those who love God and are called according to God's purpose. This experience of God working in everything for our good is for those who love God and it is for a purpose. To love God is to be in personal relationship with God. To love God is to have responded to God's irresistible love for us because first John 4:19 says, we love God because God first loved us. Having responded to God's love, we love God with all of our hearts, or we're supposed to, all of our mind, soul, and strength. To love God is to know God, to know that God is all knowing, to know that God is all powerful. To know that God only wants the best for us. Loving God is trusting God and accepting God's will for our lives. It's saying to God, I'm yours. Do whatever you want to do with me. Have your way in my life. When you love God and trust God, then you know that nothing can happen in your life that God does not permit and God does not intend to use for your benefit and for God's glory. God has a wonderful plan for each of our lives. We have been called according to God's purpose. God's plan, God's scheme, God's design for each of us ultimately is to be like Jesus Christ. Verse 29 says, for those God foreknew, God also predestined to be conformed to the image of God's son. He might be the first born among many brothers and sisters and those whom God predestined, God also called. And those who called, he also justified and those God justified he also glorified. When God created us, God made us in his image and likeness, but because of sin, the image and likeness of God in us has been marred. Before the creation, God knew that this would happen so God put a plan in place because God knew that we weren't going to be able to reclaim our creation in our own strength alone. So he sent his son Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus is the express image. The exact representation of God in the flesh. Jesus came to earth to give us a perfect example of what God created us

to be. Then he died on the cross, as I said earlier, to set us free from sin and to help us recover the image of God in us. Before we were created, before we were born God loved you. God loved us so much that he decided, he predetermined that all those who came to know him through his son, Jesus Christ, he would justify and then he would one day glorified. To be glorified is to ultimately be like Jesus. First John 3:2 says, dear friends, now we are the children of God. And what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. Now in the meantime, in the between time this is important, we are in process. God is working out God's purpose in our lives. And guess what, God is using all the things that frustrate us, that hurt us, that humiliate us, that disappoint us to shape and mold us and change us and transform us in to the very image of Christ. Like sand paper on rough edges, like buffing stones on caressed corners, like brillo on stained places God is changing us. No need to be frustrated now that you know what's happening. We have the victory. We are to live in hope. God is working it out. God has us covered, God has our back. God has everything under his control. God is changing us, transforming us. We are diamonds in the rough. Remember how diamonds are made? From a lump of coal that undergoes intense pressure. Remember too that a pearl is formed in an oyster from a grain of sand that causes irritation in the oyster. And gold is purified, all of the dross, all of the impurities are take out through intense fire. A diamond, a pearl, gold, take your pick. Whatever you wanna be, God is transforming you. Let me share with you, in closing, the last frustration given to us, or excuse me, freedom that is given to us in this text. Freedom from separation, no separation. Often when we go through challenges in our lives, the most difficult part is hanging in there particularly when we feel all alone and no one cares. There are times when we feel deserted and the reality is sometimes we are. Friends and family members may not always understand and know how to support us when we're going through difficult times. It's when we feel deserted that we hurt the most. But we can rest assure that in Christ, we have freedom from separation. That is how this chapter ends. Go back and read the entire chapter some time, won't you? Paul asks the questions, and then masterfully gives the answer to it to bring us sweet assurance as we go through our trials. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ. Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or nakedness or danger or sword, know in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth or anything else in all creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God Christ Jesus. And we know that, amen. (choir singing)

- You may be seated. The Lord be with you.

- And also with you.

- Let us pray. Oh lamb of God, we come to you this morning just as we are, with our sinfulness, our brokenness, our frustrations, our fears. We come just as we are knowing that in you there is no condemnation, but forgiveness, wholeness, assurance, peace. We come believing in the power of your holy spirit to transform us from the inside out. We come clinging to the promise that you are able to free us from your death dealing ways and give us life abundant. We come knowing that whoever are and whatever we've done, you receive us with open arms. We come boldly believing that it is your will to call us children, to make us your own and to work all things for our good. For this and all your blessings, we give you thanks. Lord and your mercy, hear our prayer. Oh God, teach us to walk according to the ways of your spirit. Be our

vision and our guide. Our highest aspiration and our deepest hope. Show us what is possible when we live life according to the spirit. Helps us learn to seek you first in all things. Dwell in us that we may dwell in you. Make our ways your ways. Empower us with your holy spirit so that we may fulfill the law of love. Make us transparent so that those who look at our lives may see a glimpse of your great love and mercy. Lord and you mercy, hear our prayer. Oh God, from the beginning of time you have provided for our physical and spiritual needs. In Christ you revealed your concern for our whole lives, choosing to walk and live among us. We know that you know our needs before we even speak them, but you have also said, ask and you shall receive. So we ask for your blessing and your healing touch upon all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. And silence, we lift up our own needs and frustrations, and the needs of those close to us. Lord make us whole in the way you know to be best for us. Make us free. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray also for the needs of our community and world. Be with all those recovering from the damages of Hurricane Bertha. We pray for those in distress, with financial difficulty, unemployment, homelessness, violence, illness, oppression. We pray for the churches that have been burned and for those who live with the thread of violence. Help us become more caring communities, where all share in the blessings of creation and overcome the forces of hatred and teach us to celebrate the glorious diversity of your creation. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Oh Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people. We pray with great hope because we know that your spirit takes up our prayers where they leave off and praise with us and for us. We pray with great confidence that all things work together for the good of those who love you and are called according to your purpose. In the name of Christ we pray, amen. Let us show our gratitude to the Lord with our gifts of thanksgiving. (soft organ music) (choir singing) (choir singing) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ Amazing God, the gifts you have give us, our gifts pale into insignificance. And yet we know that just as we 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. And now let us pray with confidence as the children of God. Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they 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. (choir singing) Go forth abounding in the hope and power of the Holy Spirit. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ♪ Hallelujah, amen, amen. ♪ (traditional organ music) (choir singing) What joy there can be loving God. In the giving and receiving of cool, refreshing water. Thank you for the living water that we have received from Christ and our privileged to share. Bless the resources gathered to today to sustain the programs and outreach of this chapel and the congregation. May these gifts of our words and our deeds and our sustenance make an effective witness to Jesus Christ, savior of the world, who taught us to pray together saying, our father who are in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses are 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 forever, amen. (traditional organ music) (choir singing) Go in peace. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the communion of the holy spirit be with you and keep you, amen. ♪ The Lord bless you and keep you ♪ ♪ The lord make his grace to shine upon you ♪ ♪ To shine upon and be gracious ♪ ♪ And be gracious unto you ♪ ♪ The lord bless you and keep you ♪ ♪ The lord make his grace to shine upon you ♪ ♪ To shine upon you and be gracious ♪ ♪ And be

gracious unto you ♪ ♪ The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you ♪ ♪ The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you ♪ ♪ And give you peace ♪ ♪ And give you peace ♪ ♪ And give you peace ♪ ♪ And give you peace ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ (traditional organ music)