

- Good morning, welcome to this service of worship on the seventh Sunday after Epiphany. This is the Sunday that we receive canned goods for the poor, and a box is located in the narthex for that purpose. We thank the congregation at Duke Chapel, for their help with this project. This afternoon at four there will be a service of memorial and thanksgiving for the life and work of Alex Haley, which will be led by the ministry of Duke Chapel and black campus ministry here in the Chapel at 4:00 p.m. Now let us join together in the greeting. Let us stand. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Splendor of Christ shines upon us.

Congregation: Praise the Lord. (solemn organ music) (congregation singing hymn) (powerful organ music) (congregation singing hymn)

- Let us join together in the prayer of confession found on page 890 in your hymn book.

Congregation: Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us, and forgive us that we might delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your name, amen.

- Almighty God, have mercy on you. Forgive all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ. Strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep you in eternal life, amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together the pray for illumination.

Congregation: Open our hearts and minds, O' God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that this word is read and proclaimed. We might hear with joy what you say to us today, Amen.

- The first reading is taken from Paul's first letter to Corinthians chapter 15 starting with 35th verse. But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? "With what kind of body do they come?" Fool, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies, and as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body. So it is with resurrection of the dead. What is sown, is perishable. What is raised, is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a physical body. It is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written: The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. But it

is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical and then the spiritual. The first man was from the Earth, a man of dust. The second man is from Heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust and as is the man of Heaven, so are those who are of Heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the Man of Heaven. What I am saying brothers and sisters is this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- Please join in singing responsively Psalm 37:1-11 found on page 772 in the hymnal. Let us stand for the singing of the Psalm. (soft organ music) ♪ Do not be angry because of the wicked ♪ ♪ Do not be envious of wrong doers ♪ ♪ For they'll soon fade like the grass ♪ ♪ And wither like the green plants ♪ ♪ Trust in the Lord and do good ♪ ♪ So you will dwell in the land ♪ ♪ And enjoy security ♪ ♪ Take delight in the Lord ♪ ♪ He'll give you the desires of your heart ♪ ♪ Commit your way to the Lord ♪ ♪ Trust in God who will act ♪ ♪ Bring forth your vindication as the light ♪ ♪ And your right as the noonday ♪ ♪ Be still and wait patiently for the Lord ♪ ♪ Do not get angry when evil men prosper in their ways ♪ ♪ Because for those who carry it out it will be useless ♪ ♪ Refrain from anger and forsake wrath ♪ ♪ Do not be angry it leads only to evil ♪ ♪ For evil doers shall be cut off ♪ ♪ Those who wait upon the Lord shall possess the land ♪ ♪ Yet a little while and the wicked will be no more ♪ ♪ Though you look at their place ♪ ♪ They will not be there ♪ ♪ But the meek shall possess the land ♪ ♪ Take delight in abundance and receive ♪ ♪ All glory be to you Creator ♪ ♪ And to Jesus Christ our Savior ♪ (congregation singing gently) ♪ As it was ere time begun ♪ ♪ And it shall forever be forevermore ♪

- Last year Mr. Ted Turner of Atlanta, now husband of Jane Fonda, who does workout tapes, said, "Christianity is a religion for losers." For this ill-considered remark, Mr. Turner was required to do penance at a Baptist church in Atlanta. Who's the loser now? But there is some evidence that Mr. Turner, perhaps in the company of Ms. Fonda, was reading Luke 6:27-36 when he arrived at this low opinion of the Christian faith. Here is today's gospel. But I say to you love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. To the one who strikes you on the cheek offer the other also. From the one who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you. And of the one who takes away your goods, do not ask for them back again, and as you wish that one would do to you, do also to that one. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much again. But love your enemies. Do good and lend expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great. You will be called children of the Most High. For God is kind to the ungrateful and to the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- Now in the winning is everything world of Ted Turner or of you or me, Jesus's words in today's gospel appear to be a kind of recipe for the production of losers. "But I say to you-- "But I say to you," implying that we have heard otherwise--and indeed we have. "But I say to you, love your enemies. "Do good to those who

hate you. "Bless those who curse you. "Turn the other cheek. "If they come for your coat, "give them the shirt off your back as well." As if there weren't already enough losers in this fallen world, it appears that Jesus wants to produce even more. "If anybody takes away your goods, don't ask for them back." One loss is followed by another. Not only have we lost our goods, but now we have lost our self-respect. Losers. To those who have actually been ripped off, violated, raped, mugged, abused, oppressed, it would be difficult to think of a more devastating demand of Jesus. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who persecute you. Pray for those who abuse you. One great loss, a favorite coat, a piece of beloved family jewelry, childhood innocence, a well-deserved career is now followed by another loss: the loss of our self respect and self esteem as we try to follow Jesus' prohibition against setting things right, getting even, justice. I just don't know of many more devastatingly difficult words of Jesus than these-- particularly for losers who live in a world of winners. Of course, I suppose much depends on one's definition of "winning." Whether or not a loss is a loss, I suppose does depend on the rules of the game, the goal. You can probably think of a number of places in Scripture where Jesus labels those whom we regard as winners as losers, and you can indeed think of places in Scripture where those whom our world labels as losers are called winners. Which is enough to make one think that perhaps we are playing by the rules of a very different sort of game. Jesus suggests this. "If you love those who love you, well, what credit is that?" Big deal! Anybody can love when loved. If you return good when good is done to you, well so what? Even the sinners do the same. Who doesn't? All you've done is played by the rules and followed that game, but you haven't won really anything because everybody wins at that game. Everybody plays like that. This game of tit-for-tat retribution-- who doesn't play that game well? And because everybody plays that game well, then everybody wins and, therefore, nobody wins. Jesus, in calling the losers winners and the winners losers, appears to be describing some sort of different game. I remember visiting in a kindergarten class in which the teacher excitedly showed me a game that the children were playing, and in the game a child stood about three feet away from this huge basket and attempted to throw large sponge balls into the basket. Well, of course, everyone was able to throw the ball into the basket. By the time I got there, the children appeared to be bored with the game. I said, "Everyone seems to be winning," and the teacher, very self-satisfied: "Yes, yes, that's the point. "It's designed to help foster a positive self-image." Well, from what I could see, it was mainly fostering boredom in the children. Some of the children would now turn their backs to the basket and flip the ball over their shoulders. When they succeeded at that, other stood on their head and tried to throw the ball in. When everybody wins, it's really nothing to win. Jesus, in noting that the ethic of retribution comes quite naturally to everybody, invites us to play by the rules of a different game. You're not a winner if you've succeeded in a game that everybody knows how to play, where everybody is a born pro. I think, Jesus is attempting to dislodge us from our notions of what winning is and what the game is. What is the game? A friend of mine returned from the Soviet Union a few years ago and announced, "There's nobody in the churches over there "except for a few little old ladies." Well, after the events of the past couple of years, I think we are now better able to assess the significance of those few believing little old ladies. As things turned out, they really knew the score, more so than the folks up at the Kremlin or the University of Moscow. Mr. Lenin is gone. Mr. Gorbachev is gone. The little old ladies won. But what happened? In a 1978 essay, "The Power of the Powerless" "The Power of the Powerless", Vaclav Havel says that, "Communism always depended upon "massive popular acquiescence. "Not enough people were willing to say no. "Too many people were willing to make all of those "innumerable everyday gestures of consent, "by which a brutal system reinforced its image "as somehow eternally ordained, "scientifically constructed monolith. "But the

monolith began to crumble "with unspectacular grassroots withdrawal of consent. "Ordinary people." says Havel, "in dozens of ordinary places, simply refused "further to participate in the Communist lie." They refused to play by the rules of a game they knew now was silly. Now Havel asked, "From whence came this "newfound courage to resist, to say no "to a massive time-honored tradition "of acquiescence and consent?" Havel says that the courage to resist, he believes, was largely religious in origin. The courage to say no came by people having been devastated by a more massive "yes", so that religion was able to subvert and overcome politics. In case you're keeping score, it's believing little old ladies one, and Lenin, Stalin, etcetera zero. We all know the world's game. We've played it from birth. The winners in this game get to go to the head of the class. They get to come to prestigious universities. They're allowed to sit in the boardrooms of big corporations. The losers, on the other hand, are warehoused in nursing homes, foster care, jails, shelters for the homeless. Now is that what Jesus wants, more losers, more children, and more women thrown overboard in this triage called a free economy? Hasn't there already been enough giving by the poor, enough cheek-turning by battered women, enough losing, without Jesus calling for even more losers? Are not the smart ones in this world, those who finally wake up and get a gun or at least a lawyer and get even? Are not the winners those people who finally get it through their brains that the rules of this world are those set up by Thomas Hobbes, not Jesus. That the game we're playing is called Social Darwinism, not the gospel. Well, here's what I think. Jesus has absolutely no stake in the production of more losers. There are victims enough without the gospel producing more. Rather, I think, that Jesus, through these words in Luke, is inviting us to participate in a very different game with different rules, and thereby to win. Terry Anderson. Terry Anderson had his life ripped off by a bunch of hooligans quoting high-sounding political slogans. They beat him, they kidnapped him, they abused him, they stole the best years of his life with his family. Note that Anderson was seized after our devastation of Beirut and bombing of Libya. But, of course, this is the way the world works. We bomb, they kidnap, but it's the same game. Now when Terry Anderson was at last made free, a reporter asked, "What would you like to see the U.S. do to your captors? "Would you like to see your captors "at last brought to justice and paid back?" Terry Anderson replied, "It's not what I'd like, "I'm a Catholic. "As a Christian, I'm commanded to forgive." Now I ask you, in that moment, was Terry Anderson a loser? Doesn't it all depend on what you think are the rules of the game? This summer here in Durham, two teenagers burned a couple of cars and a family's new home for a kick. When the youths were brought to trial, the judge said that, going by the rules, he ought to throw the book at them "and put them away in jail for good." But he asked the victimized families what they wanted, and they said that they would like something even more difficult to obtain than punishment. They would like change. So the judge acted in accordance with the families' wishes, and he sent the two boys back to school telling them, "You have just been given a new life." Now I ask you, in that trial, was that family the loser? Would you call them victims, or would you call them victors? I suppose it all depends on what you think the game is that we are playing. What is the name of the game? Love your enemies. Do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and you will be called children of the Most High. For God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, even as your Father in Heaven has been merciful. I believe Jesus' words are an invitation to forsake the game that anybody can win for a more challenging contest. Everything hinges on your answer to the question: do you really believe that this is God's world or not? Do you really believe that God is alive, busy working to bring good out of evil, or not? Everything hinges on that question. Do you believe that the only game worth winning is the game of obedience to the reality of God? I hear Jesus saying, "You act this way simply because "this is reality, because this is God's way." You play by these rules for no better reason than that

they happen to be God's rules. Or, as Terry Anderson put it, "It's not what I'd like. "I'm a Catholic, Christian. "I'm commanded to forgive." I believe the world is awaiting a few ordinary people, who withdraw their consent from the present system. I believe the world is awaiting a few ordinary people to believe Jesus. A few old ladies in Moscow, a family here in Durham, somebody running loose over at Gilbert Adams who plays by different rules, having gotten the notion that God's got a different game. Fred Craddock notes that Leviticus 19, Leviticus 19, one of the oldest portions in the Bible, Leviticus 19 says: You are not to curse anybody who is deaf. Why not? I mean, if he's deaf he can't hear you curse him. What does he care? Doesn't do him any harm. You are not to curse anybody who's deaf--who cares? Leviticus 19 gives answer: Because I am your God. You shall be holy. You're supposed to be like me. Our behavior, the rules under which we work, are not devised on the basis of what I want, or even on the basis of what my neighbor wants, but rather on the basis of who God is. He's kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. We know that. He's been kind to us, and we're supposed to act like that. So as you come to the Lord's table, I want you to think about that. I want you to look into that blood-red cup of wine. I want you to savor that broken body, and I want you to remember a God, who, by his life and death, showed us that God really is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Do this. Do this in remembrance-- we're not called to be losers. We are called to be powerful, world changing, revolutionary people. Like God, we can forgive.

Female: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Merciful God, we come before you as an unmerciful people seeking your mercy. We have learned to live as the world teaches us by tit-for-tat rules of reward and punishment. We grasp tightly what is ours and share ourselves and our possessions with only the few we deem worthy, and we wonder why ours is a world torn apart by selfishness, suspicion, hatred, and violence. You sent your Son, Jesus the Christ, to show us a better way to live. We pray that you will speak to our fearful hearts torn apart by conflict, and open us to the way that leads to eternal life. Lord in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- Teach us to approach life with open arms and open hearts ready to share our possessions and our lives for the building of your kingdom and the uplifting of another. Lord in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- Teach us to trust in your promises when we encounter situations that cause us fear and doubt. When our natural inclination is fight or flight, give us courage to stand with Jesus, having confidence in your power to turn all things to good. Lord in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer

- Teach us to reach out to those our world defines as losers, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the minority,

the oppressed, the victimized, the powerless. Use us to upset the status quo as those who are last in the world's eyes become first in our concern. Lord in your mercy.

Congregation: Hear our prayer.

- Teach us to forgive others as you forgive us, not out of worthiness but out of the abundance of your love. Help us return to those who have hurts us, and offer them our forgiveness, so that we too might be free to love. Lord in your mercy.

Congregation: Here our prayer.

- Teach us to live by your rules, offering love instead of hate, blessing instead of cursing, prayer instead of abuse, non-violence instead of violence, selflessness instead of selfishness, good instead of evil, mercy instead of hardness. As we come to your communion table. Build us into a new community of love, that the world might see in us a new and better way to live. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen. As a forgiven people, let us offer signs of forgiveness and reconciliation to one and other. Please stand as we share the peace. (congregation chatting) You may be seated. Freely we have received. Freely let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God. (lively organ music) (choir singing hymn joyfully) (gentle organ music) ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise God all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Praise God, above ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Let us join together in the prayer of thanksgiving. The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them unto the Lord.

- Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Congregation: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

- Blessed are you Lord our God, our light and salvation. Before the mountains were brought forth, you had formed the Earth. You alone our God. And so with your people on Earth and all the company of Heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn. (gentle organ music) (congregation and choir singing hymn) Truly holy are you, Father. In the fullness of time you revealed yourself in your blessed Son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world. In his table he identified with sinners. He preached good news to the poor and proclaimed release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind. On the night his disciples betrayed and deserted him he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, "Take, eat, this is my body given for you. "Do this in remembrance of me." When the supper was over, her

took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples and said, "Drink from this all of you. "This is the blood of the new covenant. "Poured out for you and many for the forgiveness of sins. "Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." His presence is continued with his people as they have shared in the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup. So in the remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a living holy sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith. (gentle organ music) (congregation and choir singing hymn) Send the power your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts. That in the breaking of this bread and the drinking of this wine, we may know the presence of the living Christ, be one body in him, and look forward to his coming in final victory. Through him, with him in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God now and forever. (gentle organ music) ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

Congregation: 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. 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, the power, and the glory forever, amen.

- When we break the bread is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? When we give thanks over the cup, is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ. Come to the Lord's table. You're invited to join the choir in singing the first hymn that's listed in the bullet. (gentle organ music) (congregation and choir singing hymn) (gentle organ music) (choir singing softly) Stand for the benediction. Now may the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (lively organ music) (congregation and choir singing hymn) (gentle organ music)