

- Duke University Chapel, service of worship, March 25, 1979. (slow organ music) (solemn organ music) (slow organ music) (bright organ music) (solemn organ music) (slow organ music) ♪ Lord Jesus savior ♪ ♪ My God of nations ♪ ♪ Somehow I have ♪ ♪ Somehow I have ♪ ♪ Glory all God has ♪ ♪ Praise my Lord of nations ♪ ♪ Now and forevermore in God ♪ ♪ Now and forevermore in God ♪ ♪ Praise be God ♪ (majestic organ music) (organ music drowns out singers)

- No one may truly come into the sacred presence of the holy one of Israel who does not first acknowledge uncleanness, the sins of heart and hand, who does not say (speaks a foreign language), lord have mercy. Therefore, let us join in a unison prayer of confession. Let us pray. Almighty God, we confess ourselves unworthy of the least of thy mercies. Thou has made us for thyself but we have gone our own way and done our own pleasure. We have not loved thee with all our heart and with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind. We have been intent on our own advancement and have passed our neighbor by on the other side. Lover of the souls of us all, forgive us so that we who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished. By the comfort of thy grace, may mercifully be relieved through our lord and savior, Jesus Christ. May thy grace turn us from our unworthy ways to walk in the ways on thy love. That enduring hardness, as good followers of Jesus Christ, we may deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him. So may we be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another even as thou in Christ has forgiven us and to thee shall be praise and glory forever. Let us each confess silently our sins before God. Hear these words of assurance. As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. Amen. As forgiven people, we now give thanks for God is holy and God's love is ever present. (congregation speaking softly) Amen. I would call your notice to several announcements in the bulletin and one further announcement that was squeezed out for lack of space. That is that part five in the seven part historical worship service series, sponsored by the Faith and Arts Committee of the University Parish Ministries will take place this evening, March 25, at 7:30 PM in York Chapel. This will be a congregational worship service from the period of the Revolutionary War in America conducted by Dr. Barney Jones. Subsequent services will include a service of worship from the Black Tradition on April first and an American Frontier Service on April eighth. Everyone is welcome to attend these in York Chapel. I would like to also to draw your attention to the Annual Crop Walk to be held next Sunday afternoon and the ways that you may indicate your intention to participate with the insert in the bulletins explaining more about the purposes, procedures of crop. There will be tables set up in the north X in front of the chapel. As you may sign up there as you leave the service this morning if you are intending to participate. It has been a happy custom for a number of years to have a preacher from the student body at least one Sunday of the year so that there may be some turn about in the direction of Christian communication and those of us of advancing years who tend to claim a monopoly on wisdom may hear and learn something from our juniors. The student preacher today is Clarence Kanipe, a junior in Trinity College. He's been active in the work of the Duke University Parish Ministry and we gladly hear his interpretation of God's word.

- 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 Old Testament lesson is from the ninth chapter of Amos, verses 13 through 15. Behold the days are coming, says the lord, when the plow man shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes, him who sows the seed. The mountain shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel and they shall rebuild the ruined cities They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them, says the lord, your God. Here ends the reading from the Old Testament. Amen. (solemn organ music) (organ drowns out singers) ♪ Behold ♪ ♪ Behold ♪ ♪ Behold ♪ ♪ Behold ♪ ♪ God has saved my day ♪ ♪ God has saved my day ♪ (organ drowns out singers) ♪ God has saved my day ♪ (organ drowns out singers) ♪ You saved me ♪ ♪ You saved me ♪ ♪ You saved me a little ♪ (organ drowns out singers) ♪ Your mercy ♪

- Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the gospel lessons? The gospel lessons are from the 13th chapter of Matthew, verses 31 through 33, the first chapter of Mark, verses 14 through 15, and the 17th chapter of Luke, verses 20 through 21. Another parable he put before them saying, the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds but when it is grown, it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour till it was all leavened. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them. The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed nor will they say, lo, here it is or there for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. Here ends the reading from the gospel. All praise and glory be to God. Amen. (majestic organ music) (organ drowns out singers)

- One of my favorite Peanuts comic strips has Lucy and Charlie Brown talking together. Lucy says, think about this day for a moment, Charlie Brown. This could very well be the most important day in your life. When a day begins, you never really know what is gonna happen and Charlie Brown begins to build up his confidence a little bit. He says, you're right Lucy, and this very ordinary day could really turn out to be the most important day in my life. And then Lucy says, but it probably won't. Jesus said, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Life. Life. What a glorious promise that is. Through the person and the ministry of Jesus, we are promised that our lives can be full, rich, meaningful, abundant. As the psalmist put it, our cups overflow. As we read in the first epistle of John, we are God's children now and as Jesus said, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you and so this morning, my message is quite simple. Life as we know it on this earth is very important. Everything from sunshine to smog, from babies crying to nuclear weapons and cancer, from churches to Moonies, Jonestown, everything that we call life in the 20th century is very important because it is life. Too often Christianity has set its sights on life in the hereafter and has forgotten that there is no hereafter until after here, after life on this earth. While the world has run around trying to save its life, to save the flesh and ignored the soul, Christianity has all too often tried to save souls that didn't have bodies. I think Christian theology has all too often taken one of two routes. The first route we might call turn or burn theology. It states very simply that either you believe in Jesus as your savior or you spend eternity burning in hell. That's not a statement, that's a threat. Well, I remember when I was a

youngster going to Sunday school, that used to be one of the biggest motivators for me to read my bible, to go to church, to say my prayers because whenever I was sick, whenever I hurt myself, I would think, boy, hell's gonna be a lot worse than this and I just don't know if I can stand it. Well, the second road is similar to the first road. I once saw a bumper sticker that pretty well summed up this point of view. It said, Christians' retirement benefits are out of this world. Well, I also remember when I was in Sunday school as a youngster, when I wasn't thinking about how awful hell would be, a lot of times I would think how wonderful heaven was gonna be. Having never seen three of my grandparents, I used to think that one of the biggest drawing cards for heaven was that I would get to see them and a lot of famous people besides. Well, Jesus talked differently about the kingdom of God. He talked about the kingdom of God in the present tense, the kingdom of God today. Jesus says, since John came, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached. He says, don't be afraid for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. He says, this kingdom is in the midst of you. And the Old Testament prophets have some beautiful visions of the kingdom of God with their messiah reigning and, you know, they never, never talk about ivory palaces, crystal fountains, pearly gates but they talk about this earth, this very earth that you and I live on. Now these visions are visions. They're not photographs of the details of the kingdom of God but they show us the spirit of the kingdom and it can't be separated from life today. You recall what we heard from Amos a few moments ago. They shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land and they shall never again be plucked up. No pearly gates but vineyards, rebuilt cities, gardens and no hell of fire because what could be more hellish than to be excluded from such a glorious kingdom? Look at the Beatitudes. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit ivory palaces? No. They shall inherit the earth. And perhaps it is only the meek who can really tell us what a glorious promise this is for one day this earth on which you and I are living right now, one day this very life that you and I are living will experience the full transformation of our lord's redemption just as it is now received a partial transformation. It just may be that this transformed life is not so different from the life that we know right now. It seems that one of our main problems with the kingdom of God is the very same problem that the Jews had in Jesus's day. We're looking for the wrong kind of kingdom. We forget so easily that the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed. It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour. It is like a seed which grows secretly. Many of you probably saw the recent movie, Oh, God! George Burns played God. He decided to reveal himself to all-American boy supermarket manager who was played by John Denver. At one point, God has just met Jerry in his bathroom and so he begins to unload all his pent up questions on God. He asks him why he doesn't do something drastic about all the problems that are in the world, all the pain, all the suffering, and God says something like this, oh, you mean a miracle? Well I don't do miracles. They're too flashy. Oh, once in a while just to keep my hand in it. The last one was the 69 Mets. But God is speaking about miracles in Jerry's mistaken terms. He's speaking about flashy miracles. A little later he tells Jerry that if he really wants to see a miracle, all he has to do is to go look at a fish. Perhaps we should rephrase God's lines and make 'em sound something like this, oh, you mean a miracle? Why that's all I do. One miracle after another. You look at your body. Look at the sun. Tonight, look at the stars when they come out. Pretty good, huh? You humans just don't use the right words. You don't see things in the right way. Jesus said the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed but it is so much in our midst that we don't even recognize it. In his book, Letters and Papers from Prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes the following words, it is only when one loves life and the world so much that without them everything would be gone. It is only then that one can believe in the resurrection and a new world and

yes, it is only those of us who can catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God today, now. Only those of us can have a true concept of eternal glory. But things are not as rosy as they may seem. You know the old comedy line, I have some good news and some bad news. Well, this is the bad news part of this sermon. For just as surely as the kingdom of God has partly come, hell has also partly come on this earth and just as surely as we miss the kingdom of God on this earth, we miss hell on this earth also. All our threats of hell in the hereafter and all our caricatures of Satan and hell, you know, Blue Devils that play football and basketball and those things, all these things have blinded us to the reality of hell right in our very midst. To put it very frankly, we don't love deeply enough to realize the hell of an alcoholic or a drug addict or a prostitute or a student or professor who is so tied up in his books that he or she loses life itself. Or a millionaire who has money to have anything but finds no meaning in it. Yes, I think if you ask any of those people how close hell is, they would tell you that it's all too close. T.S. Eliot is a poet who is very famous for seeing hell in our daily lives. In his poem, *The Wasteland*, he paints a picture of the hell that he sees in London. He writes, unreal city, under the brown fog of a winter dawn, a crowd flowed over London Bridge. So many. I had not thought death had undone so many. Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled and each man fixed his eyes before his feet. Jesus also knew how hellish this life can be for as much as anything in the gospels, we see Jesus going around, casting out demons and just what kind of world is this with demons if it's not a world in which hell is frighteningly real. And you know, isn't it interesting that the people that we see Jesus keeping company with are the very people who are experiencing hell in their lives right now? We see him calling a tax collector to come down from a tree to go eat dinner with him. We see him speaking with prostitutes, with adulteresses, all those people who are not respectable but Jesus doesn't seem to care. He says he came to heal the sick, not to heal the well. Jesus came to share the burden of hell on this earth and he came to introduce the kingdom of God. And so, as disciples of this Jesus, it is our responsibility to change as much of hell as we can into the kingdom of God just as he did. It's a very stern word that Jesus speaks to us. He says, unless you're willing to take up your cross, unless you're willing to lose your very life for my sake, then you'll never find the kingdom of God and you'll never find true life. And so, at the end of the gospel of John, we see Jesus talking to Peter and he says, Peter, if you love me, me, then feed my sheep. Peter, if you love me, in other words, you must suffer through the hell that you see destroying other people. You must share the burden of hell because you know what true life is and you know that anything apart from me is hell even though it may be disguised and you know that I still share the burden of hell because I am love. Our good friend, Charlie Brown, has experienced hell also. In another cartoon, the gang is playing baseball. Charlie Brown mutters to himself on the pitcher's mound. Boy, I must be stupid. I must be out of my mind to stand up here like this. My team hates me. I'm a lousy pitcher and my stomach hurts. I must really be stupid. Then Linus comes up with a bit of worldly philosophy. He says, Charlie Brown, you can't go on like this. You're not enjoying life at all. The moments you spend out here on the pitcher's mound are moments to be treasured. You're not gonna be a child forever, Charlie Brown, so treasure these moments. And so Charlie Brown again, builds up his confidence. He fires in his next pitch and it comes back about 10 times as fast as it went in. It knocks him down, knocks him flat on his back, knocks off his cap, his glove, his shoes, everything but his Bermuda shorts and Charlie Brown lies there flat on his back on the pitcher's mound and he says, this is a difficult moment to treasure. (congregation laughing) And so it is. But you see, Christianity insists that hell is important. It is central to the gospel message that this hell on earth is making souls ready to receive a life after death. Maybe you're familiar with the old version of the Apostle's Creed before we made it nice. It used to read, Jesus was crucified, dead, and descended into hell. Saint Paul writes that if any man is in Christ, he

is a new creature and surely being in Christ means going through hell with Christ. Hell helps make us into new creatures. We come out differently from the way we went in. Yes Charlie Brown, hell is a part of life and yes, it is a moment to be treasured. Now in saying how important life on this earth is, I hope I have not implied that eternity is unimportant for know it is so important that perhaps we can't grasp its true greatness but eternity is not important enough to blind us to the glories of the kingdom of God right now, today, on this earth nor is it important enough to blind us to the horrors of hell. And another point in Oh, God! A council of theologians has been set up to ask a bunch of questions to God, whoever he might be. One of the questions concerns the meaning of man's existence and God responds something like this, each individual's existence means exactly what that person thinks it means at any particular time. Nothing more, nothing less. As Christians, as followers of the king, as the ones who know the kingdom is come, it is our responsibility to see the kingdom, to share the kingdom with others and to change hell into the kingdom. A few years ago, a popular song was written called Today. The last verse had the following words, I can't be contented with yesterday's glories and I can't live on promises, winter to spring. Today is my moment. Now is my story. I'll laugh and I'll cry and I'll sing. In his book, The Great Divorce, C.S. Lewis beautifully sums up what I've been trying to say. He writes, but what, you ask, of earth? Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of heaven, will turn out to have been all along only a region in hell and earth, if put second to heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of heaven itself. The kingdom is in our midst and if we can't see it here, today, then we can't see it anywhere at all. Father, grant us the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the faith to believe, and the love to work for your kingdom. Amen. (majestic organ music) (organ drowns out singers)

- Let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God who has created and is creating, 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 its 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. Oh God, we praise thee and thank thee for thyself who takes an acorn and makes it a tree, sets air over us and daylight and the large pictures of each season. Gives us the walk and run of the body, the mind's radar, and the heart's insatiable dreams. We praise thee and thank thee for thyself who gives us the gifts we do not earn, the strength we do not have and the forgiveness we do not deserve. Unto thee be all glory and honor, dominion and power, world without end. Oh Lord God of all creation, you made this world a garden and appointed us its stewards. Help us though to care for your earth that it may produce good fruit and plenty. Keep us from preoccupation with convenience and our own gain so that we will not despoil this garden and deprive others of its enjoyment. Keep us daily mindful of the hungry, Lord, and of the fact that they need not be so. Let us never forget that we have our abundance at the cost of others privation. So may we dedicate ourselves to making your earth a place of justice as well as of plenty. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ in whose name we are commanded to break bread with all and who taught us when we pray to say, our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (solemn organ music) (organ drowns out singers) (slow organ music drowns out singers) (majestic organ music) (organ drowns out singers) Almighty God, by the bounty of whose grace we live our

years in peace and plenty, accept these our gifts as tokens of our worship of thee. Renew in us the will to share the yield of the earth with those in need. In Christ's name, amen. (solemn organ music) (organ drowns out singers) (majestic organ music) (organ drowns out singers) Now may the grace of our lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all. Amen. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Ah ah ah ah amen ♪ ♪ Ah ah ah ah amen ♪ ♪ Ah ah ah ah amen ♪ ♪ Ah ah amen ♪ (solemn organ music) (congregation talking softly)