

Collection of Sermons by Ed Christman 1983-2003

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Chapel Sermon 4/28/83

ED CHRISTMAN: Many thanks to our worship leaders, musicians, our musician in residence Rob Ulery who has contributed a great deal to the quality and reverence of these services. It is a special kind of time of thanks because Carolyn our older daughter is a student at Wake Forest. Kim is. Jean is probably going to pass chapel 101 this semester. So we're all here, seniors, not so fresh fresh-people who have had the baptism of fire, who know what it is to sweat blood and wish that they too could burn their books, but we neither sweat blood nor we burn books. We have a stage manager, Becky Garrison, still at work on *Guys and Dolls* so she brings us the American flag and the Salvation Army flag on the assumption that what we have to say has something to do with that flag and its particular ominous words, blood and fire.

Yet we're all gathered here in the mission. All of us and the words that come to us from the Lord is "Repent all ye sinners." We have been told by the megabucks of the board of visitors and others of this city according to the paper that the search committee's process of selecting a new president is not broad enough, which I translate to mean they're not sure that someone will be picked like themselves. [laughter] But before we castigate those people who have even more money than you and me put together, let us ask ourselves if the chairman of the board whose name incredibly is Hope can see beyond his own vision of the persons. Who's on that list of 150 names? The Bible says repent, which means don't stand with what you have been and what you are. Broaden your vision. Why, of course megabucks of Winston-Salem and search committee. The Bible says broaden the search and that means old and young men and women and blacks. It means people you don't have on your list ought to be considered. That's what the Bible says. I read it to mean at least three qualifications: obedience to God, stewardship of time and talent, which certainly would mean an appreciation of learning, and one characteristic which you have to search for in scripture but I do find it from time to time. Good humor, which is just another way of saying accept one's finitude. Don't take oneself too seriously.

Would not the search for such a person, obedient and stewardly and of good humor be a worthwhile purpose for us all if we would discern the will of God, but alas, but alas we are in the devil's college. We're in the devil's playground. This place is as dark as two feet down a wolf's gullet. [laughter] This is a gathering. Mind you (). [laughter] So before we castigate those that I certainly like to castigate congressmen, directors of Reynolds Tobacco Company and the foundations and all the rest, let's remember that the Bible's broad brush and scope that talks about the need for repentance and talks about those from whom blood is the tool of violence and fire is nuclearism. Let us not forget ourselves here in this place. For indeed as one member of the cast said, "I'm really sorry." I think he was perhaps sorry that he'd lost all that

money, but in truth Brian Bakke and the rest of us are just sorry. We are in need of repentance, and that's what the Bible says, every single one and every system and that includes this marvelous university, every system of which we are a part.

Mary Causby spoke that word. She is one of those people whom Joel was talking about. Joel incidentally is one of the more obscure prophets of the Old Testament. Not quite as obscure and no pun intended, not quite as short as Obadiah, but nonetheless, that's who we find telling us to broaden our vision, deepen our search, not just for a president but for our own purpose. In so doing we would discover that blood as given by God is life. Fire is light, and it need not be the tools of violence, be it verbal or economic. It need not be that which destroys and causes us to be afraid. It can in fact be a source of light that penetrates that wolf's gullet. So if repentance is what Joel and Peter are talking about. Yes, I have left out part of that passage of scripture. I have chosen to use the part that Peter used on that incredible day. It says everyone that calls out will be saved. That's a daring and radical lack of understanding. Indeed it is easy to understand in our predictable way of life that that Salvation Army band tattered from its all-night meeting weary of the drum beating and the tambourines and the trumpeting of the Lord's word would return to their little mission here or in New York or in London or anywhere that sinners abound in the devil's workshop and say, I've got to have a cup of coffee. I've got to have something that is perhaps not as painted with sin as the world around us, maybe even a ham sandwich. I need some nourishment, some thing that will keep me going. We don't understand what keeps them going. What is that given that the principalities and power do consume us, do not give us many options that we are imprisoned by those chains. As the first hymn rather clearly said, Jesus comes, but we soon are about the business of refashioning our chains, and you see the reasons it's the devil's workshop is because the demonic smiles when we are so predictable at this university. When we balance the budget, why of course the bottom line is the bottom line. It is a sign of some sense of competence that we do balance our budget, but the Bible would say and for what purpose and if you have balanced your budget, how many lives have been left out of balance? How many concerns of education have somehow been skewed? Is that faculty really pressed to use the lifeblood that it has been given and the fire put in its heart by its other teachers and those who have cared for these teachers. Have they really, are they really working? Are the students?

Some weeks ago I said you all have been conned and some didn't seem to understand. Let me make that very clear. You have been conned because your education is not worth what you are paying for it. You think it is. But it is only on the border of liberal arts learning. You have not been asked to work hard enough, to slug your guts out as one director has been quoted as saying about life. You've not been asked to do that. Oh you think so. I do too. But the Bible says broaden that vision. You haven't split enough of that blood in worthy causes, and you have not used that fire gift that you've had. Those

rich gifts to which Neal referred have languished too much. We spend far too much time talking about how hard we're working rather than doing the work, and the devil is pleased that we're so predictable and that everything is so nice and clean and neat and square at this wonderful school. Now what would surprise the devil is surprise. That's what the devil can't stand. It's the surprise. It's someone who does rock the boat. Who is not willing to sit down individually or corporately for whom lifeblood and fire means something like sharing that light with someone else.

It was Mary and Gordon Causby and one other person who began the Church of the Savior. Three small flames, three. Out of that comes something that we now say fantastic. It's so given to importance that it subdivides. That's the church in Washington that you can't hardly get in, but the strange mystery of it is if you ever do get in it, you don't want to get out of it. Powerful, strange, some kind of surprise that people would believe that. The devil can't handle that too well. Nor does the demonic like those people for whom blood and fire mean a kind of sublime steadiness. They just go about their business.

I decided this morning to name names. Odessa Robinson, most of you don't know, is a black woman in her late sixties. Her husband died. She worked here. She is simply a person who believes there is a kingdom not made with hands or computers. She offers a bit of joy here and there to her neighbors. She comes to work one day instead of another because of church. There is something sublime and powerful about her life. You don't have to be a king maker or a king. Be a person filled with lifeblood and filled with fire. The devil can't stand steadfastness either. That kind of stubbornness that we find in Adelaide, this incredibly young woman who in some ways is so naïve. But you see she loves this bloody gambler for fourteen years, and she knows he is going to keep on gambling, but somehow she loves him and cannot do other. She is ashamed of him. She's made covenant as God has made covenant with you and me. Even with our strange and evil systems that something worthy can come from all that. So that stubborn toughness of Adelaide is something we should pay attention to. It upsets and transforms the sets of priorities which are predictable and which the demonic can relax and languish with. It does something different. A difficulty for those of us who preach on a regular basis or even occasionally is that if we were to take the Bible very seriously, it would simply dismantle our entire framework. Do I really want the trustees to consider a person who is not on that list who happens to be black or female or old or young who's weird and strange for whom obedience to God may mean radical surgery to this university. Do I really want that? Can I possibly understand that that committee could be informed the same way this prophet Joel was informed?

Four hundred years before Christ talking as if equality of opportunity and accessibility to God were the right of every priest as a believer, every person on the face of the earth and that God would care for all of them. Where did Joel get such a

notion? This narrow-minded sort of person out of his tradition and why would a man like Peter pick up on that and in effect say to us yes, there's an eternal flame in Atlanta marking the grave of Martin Luther King, Jr. and there's an eternal flame in Arlington Cemetery marking the grave of the fallen president. All run by something mechanical. Peter says I've got news for you brothers and sisters. There's a fire that doesn't have to have any kind of gas jet underneath it. There's an eternal flame. God is that consuming fire. God is such a fire that we don't have to worry. Peter says you don't understand what's going on here today. These people are not drunk with wine nor with greed as most of us are, abusing ourselves and our schemes and our life plans. No, these people are drunk with something else. They've been consumed by a fire. Blood is the gift of life, and they're not afraid to share it. So you may not understand their language. Let me give it to you straight. Jesus Christ is raised and there is therefore something new under the sun that means any system however much given to darkness can be redeemed at least in part and every person can somehow hear that message of Sara Brown, repent. Now don't worry about prison in the gallows. Worry about the ultimate question of how you spend your life and will it be spent as a giving of lifeblood to others or will it somehow just decay and die.

Well, we had a wonderful time in that show. We found out that the Bible was at least twice as accurate as the [spreadsheet?]. We did not find out that the bible was inerrant. It didn't seem to matter. Scott Masterson was trying to do something he couldn't do. But he did gamble didn't he. He did throw the dice and nicely, nicely said why don't we just sit down and take it easy and thank the Lord. Why, of course, and sometimes we will. But this Peter who on the mountain of transfiguration wanted to do that decided when he got to Acts and this stuff was going on, all this flame was running around, all this blood seemed to be alive and well and warm-blooded. Now he said I've got to figure out something else. What's God saying? The microphone was stuck in his face. The TV reporters wanted a film clip for six o'clock. Peter said well, this is what Joel was saying way back yonder four hundred years ago. God loves us all and invites us all. God needs us every single one because if this is a world that Sara Brown was trying to save, it's still in need of salvation. That darkness has not been penetrated except as the people with their lights stand in that boat and rock it. Oh praise Nathan Detroit. He told us, he told us. Your dice. That's all he said. Your dice. So all I say to you is stand up individually and collectively. Rock this boat, this one that you're in, this chapel, this school, this culture, this family life of which you are a part. Rock your own life, freshman or senior. Rock it. Take the dice in hand. Throw them. END

Chapel Sermon 9/15/83

ED CHRISTMAN: Checking out a book at the library on Monday, a student asked this question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" In substance I responded, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" I invited him to consider

by my question that the simplicity with which we would reason our way through suffering and adversity invites us to consider the revelation of God, which is to suggest that God is responsible as the psalmist had suggested for the good and the evil seem both to prosper and to suffer. The student would like for it be otherwise and I would confess that often I would to. At the faculty meeting on Monday the prayer was a series of questions and a newcomer to the faculty as she left said, "Well, I'm sure you have the answers to those questions." I said, "No, because the Bible seems to ask more questions than it answers." It again invites us to consider revelation. It invites us to consider the way God breaks through even in the turning around of the question to the student. I was not trying to make of his concern something less than a matter of considerable importance. But rather trying to suggest that no matter what our gift of reason is we are invited by God almighty to consider revelation as the final and ultimate category of how we understand who we are and what is to become of us.

So the Bible asks another question. "Who will go for us?" Some commentators think Isaiah was a person about the age of many of you and when he said, "Send me." Not having one faint idea, one rational basis for knowing what it meant to say send me. But oh how quickly he learned. Give them this message, a message of hopelessness and despair and desolation. A message, which says in effect that God will somehow prevent people from hearing good news of salvation and reconciliation. But true to those persons with whom he was linked at that moment, Isaiah offered by inference and incredibly question of his own and that was a question of hope. How long oh Lord do I preach doom and despair. Of course the inference is that Isaiah assumed that we would all assume that there is a limit, and there is an end to the preaching of judgment for the god of steadfast love will be reconciled. Jew and Greek will somehow be brought into the true state of reconciliation and will know God. How long oh Lord. The Lord says, for a very long time. Then he concludes with the words which Jim has read and which appear slightly differently in other translations and one of the modern translations that last line is in parentheses as to the substance of the stock and the sea or whether or not from a stump something will emerge. The commentators at least some say that message that Isaiah heard and was supposed to preach was too strong and that subsequently someone added a word of hope. Does it really matter whether or not it was in the original declaration for certainly that intention is in Isaiah that God says I will somehow break through even after desolation, even after the sense of ruination has spent itself upon the earth. Even the prophet Amos of whom we recited our reading this morning, the prophet for whom doom is his middle name says seek the Lord and live and just possibly God will graciously speak of the remnant of Joseph. So it is that this young man in the temple senses his own unrighteousness and somehow is claimed by God mysteriously and says he will go and take the message. That message includes a word of hope, and in so doing Isaiah linked himself with persons and groups of persons we choose to call the remnant, and so the title of the sermon, "Christians

Tattered and Alive.” For indeed are the Jews and the Gentiles who claim to be Christians are those who came before us not tattered and alive. Is there any other condition for those who follow the claims of God anything but tattered and alive. Who was this man Noah and his reluctant family who went into this strange boat? Who was this Abraham who argued with God, save the wicked city Sodom and Gomorrah, Winston-Salem it matters not. Save it for the sake of only ten. Abraham perhaps decided he couldn't () Yahweh enough he wouldn't go any further. Elijah went one step further. Elijah, after his successful war against four hundred prophets, decides the remnant is only one. If I might be excused an anthropomorphism, God laughed and flung seven thousand Israelites at him. Whenever the remnants seemingly no matter how small it may be looks around, Elijah finds there are others. Noah found somehow that his family would go along. However they didn't understand it. Abraham perhaps was surprised. Wherever the remnants seemed to appear, wherever the disciples of Isaiah gathered there was some sense, yes, we may be small in number. We're so small we probably couldn't circle our wagons against the oncoming onslaught. But we are undaunted somehow because something has happened to us. Now Noah found favor with God, and in many instances the clear indication of how it is this remnant comes to the being is because God finds purity. God finds a righteousness present. It may be only ten, but however small the number it is a pure group, righteousness prevails and for that reason God's promise is made visible. It's clear and unmistakably there for others to see and ponder. It comes out of desolation, out of fire and brimstone and flood, out of God's righteous anger against broken covenants.

Yet that sense of hope, that sense of a new direction curiously enough frees such people as Isaiah even at the beginning frees him or her to ask questions. Free from worrying about the future and free from worrying about the present image making, bridge building between oneself by the standards we usually use. Free to use God's methodology of loving kindness of caring about other persons and not worrying about how do I see, how do I look to others. Indeed an undaunted hope, which emerges often out of ashes. The seal of the city of Atlanta, which was developed after the Civil War, was the phoenix, and that certainly is applicable after the Dodger and Cincinnati series. For even now there's some of us who would dare to wear those caps. Even if they don't win the pennant. There remains some undaunted sense of hope, and when we come to much more important matters than baseball, we find that that remnant is operating on a different agenda.

So we had a convocation last Tuesday. We operated on a different agenda because an elderly man stood and without telling a single joke, using very few illustrations and stories laid before us the most important of questions about faith and reason, laid before us the centrality importance of holy scripture. Those that I will now choose and call a remnant who went at two o'clock discovered that in response to questions, this man was far more effective than he'd been before 1800

persons. But whether or not you quote liked what he had to say, the remnant would say I really don't care whether you liked him. It didn't have any effect on you. Could you understand? Could you get through our tendency to want to see the Messiah every time we have money put on the table for a major speaker? What are your expectations? What Mortimer Adler sought to do was to quicken not only our minds but our hearts, to raise the possibility of whether or not revelation was not the final category. He didn't say that. He certainly raised that possibility for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see or vision different than they had seen before. His proclamation, his words, measured and heavenly philosophical and theological of no more than twenty minutes duration were in my humble opinion far more meaningful than a decade of convocation speakers before who always seemed so intent upon making us feel good and saying clever things and useful things about the university. Why he didn't even mention Wake Forest except in passing. Remnant persons don't really need to be mentioned. They simply prevail with their vision, and they are indeed like those few according to the *Old Gold* that liked it. Now the *Old Gold* editorial is a mixed blessing for it begins by suggesting that the majority of us, the majority of us found the speech stuffy, dull, heavy and all kinds of negative words that should be associated with academic exercise. Then from the standpoint of the remnant it introduced one magnificent piece of humor. The editorial observed why we've been thinking about this faith and reason question for years. If you don't laugh out loud at that, then you're not here at this place where we spend so much time talking about what is interesting we never talk about anything. Where we never really openly disagree with one another and let our presumptions and our assumptions and our values and our faith in God or something else be out there on the table. Oh we're so clever and so pseudo-intellectual at this fine university. Yes, the editorial was predictable in that sense, and it was lamentably predictable in suggesting that after all this was a fine speech, and yet we must remember that the real questions have to do with national recognition. If you don't know what idolatry is, you just heard it. A university whether it's church-related or not is not given to that kind of recognition and obsession with it. No, I hope that as the editorial suggested that the other convocation speakers will elaborate and enlarge upon what Adler had to say. I am grateful for the editorial for suggesting that in that huge audience, the largest we've had in years, was a remnant of persons who somehow were quickened by what they heard and what they saw. Now that may sound terribly smug in a sense. But remnants you see will have to appear self-righteous because by the definition of how they came into being as God's graceful act, they can't help but appear to be different and fill the joy even though they come out of desolation and fire and brimstone. They're going to have to cut across the grain. They're going to have to say things that are not liked by other people.

So the minister of the Wake Forest Baptist Church and my pastor raised questions not about speaker as such but about what appeared on the back of the program. He questioned it. He questioned the use of certain words. On the one hand I think he was on target in questioning what any remnant that says time and substance are very fleeting, that words are important and that if you use them in such a way as to create undue confusion you should be chastised for that. Yes, and there are two sets of, there are a set of sentences there which perhaps lead to that conclusion so Dr. Carr's concern there was well founded. His second concern was not as well founded in my opinion because his sermon of last Sunday was so eloquent in discerning what remnant means as church. How could he possibly expect having laid out a vision and a direction for church, which is unique, to assume that the academy, even a church-related academy would understand obedience is coming from God necessarily. You see his very sermon suggests that the remnant's role is not to be in the majority but the minority. It's to ask questions. It's to challenge. It's to object. It's to curiously enough freed from the pretense of having to be interesting and popular and likable has in a curious sense more influence than might be imagined, mustard seed and leavened, comfortable and able to laugh at itself and others, always chiding those who think we have arrived.

Indeed this is an excellent school, and I search for and seek to be a contributor to its future excellence, but I have no illusions as a Christian about what its heart and soul ought to be. Its heart and soul have to somehow be remnant and that remnant has to come out of the closet and those here or anywhere else who somehow sense that they have been touched by God in a special way need take it on as Mr. Carr took it on. Need take on those of us who had in some sense had tenure and hide behind it. Somehow measure our responses so we'll never say anything that might make us look foolish. Indeed the remnant of God can do none other than act foolish and to link itself up, link itself with those persons whose foolishness for the sake of God has made a difference.

So what do I specifically mean? I mean that if you think of yourself as uncomfortably grace given then join the remnant. Isaiah wasn't altogether sure of what it meant to be remnant. But he didn't reason his way through that. He went to see King Ahaz, and he took his son whose name was the remnant. There will always be a remnant. He ran some risk. He acted yes out of feeling and there was fault there, but the fundamental category was that God would continue to make revelation and that Isaiah would have to operate the best that Isaiah could without full disclosure from the Lord. Link oneself up with such a person as that, push upon yourself, not to rarely read a book but to read a rare book. To take a walk, to love a friend, to care what goes on at home, to care what goes on at parties that seem to be inherently dependent upon a keg of beer. Find ways to understand what to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength means. Find your own agenda. It's here. God has offered it to you as freely as anything else.

In this particular place freedom, as our speakers in the Lewis lecture series suggested on Monday, the liberal arts freedom means the freedom not to have to believe what I say, not to have to decide that David Levy has played the violin the best that it can be played. You don't have to decide that because something as one freshman suggested appears in the paper. It must represent the paper's point of view. That's not so. Oh in this place liberal arts would mean that you are free to challenge and to question and to reject all ideas and to fashion your own as critically and as rationally as you can. The remnant would say and if you want some profound assistance in that process, consider that God has made a revelation of astounding proportions that frees you from the fear of life or death, that frees you from the fear of popularity, that frees you from any kind of linkage which would interfere with being a whole complete person and disciple of learning. Push upon yourself. I used to say now freshman, you should sort of take your time and ease into this place. Not so. Remnant says there's not enough time. The seniors will tell you that. There are many of them who wish they had five years, not because they can't pass their work, but because there are so many things here they wish they could be a part of. So the remnant urges you to recognize that time, time and opportunity are yours to seize.

Someone said as they always say every year, what do you think of the freshman class? The answer quite candidly is, not very much. How could I possibly insult them by thinking very much about them when I don't know them. The other question of course this year is, what do you think about President Hearn? Not very much because I have not seen him in the kitchen when the jets have been turned on and it's hot. What is he going to do when he is forced to make a choice between relative goods? What are his priorities? I don't know in the changing of the guard. Do I have to wait and sit around and suck my thumb until he tells us what is supposed to happen at this university? Do students have to wait on the faculty to come out of their closet and lay their values on the table? The speaker on Monday suggested and unfortunately he apologized for making a very important moral affirmation. He apologized as if he might be run out of town on a rail for saying faculty members ought to tell students what they believe. No, that's not true. The fact that many faculty are afraid and willing to do that and hide behind many a convenient vehicles doesn't obscure the point, how can we expect students to push on themselves on us unless we are somehow role models. As recently as yesterday a faculty member suggested they really didn't want us necessarily to be role models for going to the Artist Series. I said why of course you should be role models for going to the Artist Series and chapel and raising questions and allowing students to challenge and question you. The remnant in an academic community would say that liberal arts would be better served if we were daring enough to link ourselves to all those questions from the very first one and decide that God has somehow allowed us the opportunity to have a vision that we could enjoy learning. That we could enjoy studying and having an examination over the entire course and that we're not

looking for short cuts. No, quite the contrary we're looking for the hard cuts that which you might or might not cut in stone, that which might last, that which might serve you and free you from anxiety and fear. The remnant has one foot in this life and one foot in the open grave because it's not afraid to run up against the university principalities and powers and fail. It's not afraid. It can laugh or as the hymn says smile at its foes. Now the remnant is made up of fragile creatures. Elijah thought he was the only one. Noah and his family but God, a gracious and loving God said, "Look around you, Elijah. There are some others." I would invite you to look around and see if you can't link up with some Marys and some Marthas and some Elijahs and some Isaiah's. I would ask you to look around and see if there aren't some faculty who contrary to my condemnation of them this morning do share their values, are willing to talk earnestly about in whom they believe and what they believe. Allowing you the privilege of responding to that by God's grace by saying as I heard a student even this morning say, "Professor, when you say some things I feel so strongly about it, I'm going to respond." Even if it makes you feel alien to your classmates, even if you break the curve, even if you demand that on an F or a C or an A paper the professor has not done his or her job unless he's puts some comments on that paper. Even if you say as Jean and my daughter has said, "While I was in Spain some of my classmates really didn't like me because I kept on asking questions." Well, Kim Christman was the link for that teacher who was having a very difficult time believing that what she was doing was worthwhile, but there was one person who was taking her seriously. That's remnant.

I invite you to remember that this first hymn we sang this morning was the combined effort of a famous English Anglican minister who wrote the words and Franz Joseph Haydn who wrote the music. Franz Joseph Haydn during the Napoleonic Wars years after he had written the music to this powerful hymn had to be carried to the piano so he could play it again and he played it with great feeling and great emotion, three times. Five days later he died. Franz Joseph Haydn didn't die. He just claimed that foot that was in the grave and did he leave us something. A remnant always leaves its mark, its track in the sand in one form or another. There is a legacy, and it's always looking around to see and to be surprised at who else or what else will be there.

The hymn we're going to sing was written by a person who just graduated from seminary Andover Union Theological School. His classmates knowing of his musical talent said write us a song. Somehow we'll capture the vision of who and what we are. So he wrote it and I hope we will sing it and heed its message, "Lead on O King Eternal, the day of march has come."

END

ED CHRISTMAN: We do appreciate your coming to chapel and many of you who have helped in so many ways not only by your presence but by your leadership and in particular Jean Holcombe who worries about the programs every week and Mary Vick who has played for us on so many Thursdays. We are very grateful for you and to all of you.

What would be worse than to be in exile and to have been in exile for generations? What would cause more despair than that? What would be better and filled with more hope than a vision that such exile had ended, that there was to be a new exodus and that in fact you could leave Babylon and return to the land that had been promised thee as an Israelite? But how ridiculous; how absurd? What could be worse than to sense and feel your religious and national roots dissolving before your very eyes? What could prompt more despair? What could prompt more hope for us if somehow there were a vision that this alienation from our own roots, this exile from ourselves and from God could end and indeed there was something new under the sun that somehow the darkness could be pierced and the light of Jesus Christ would overcome the darkness? But somehow that too, does that not seem very ridiculous? How is it that an individual feels any sense of hope, any sense of expectation?

I mean the psalmist promised three score and ten. But I sat at lunch with a senior this spring and there is excitement and joy and possibility. But then she looked at me with those brown eyes and said, "I may not live as long as you. What good she says does it to pray? Sometimes," she said, "I don't know that it is." You see this is a Christian talking. This is not someone on the perimeter of commitment. It is a person who claims Jesus Christ is Lord and savior espousing the anxiety and lack of hope which erodes and crowds in upon us all for indeed what is it that we do when we watch a film entitled *The Day After*.

I go into the kitchen and there I see a drawer half open where Jean my spouse has been working with menus and coupons, and I am struck by the incredible trivia of preparing for Christmas in terms of breads and cakes and all the rest. Then because I had been wanting to do it anyway for other reasons not associated with advent, I took it upon myself to pick up the phone and call one of our two daughters and say, "Carolyn, I love you." What is that but some modest splash of light where this is no light? Who is it that wants to rely on the genetic engineers to heal a broken heart? Who wants to look in Carl Sagan's telescope and see anything of the distance of loneliness between people and loneliness of a person alien from themselves, exiled from their peers, alien because of age or religious belief or because of their color or their poverty? Carl Sagan's telescope is a very puny instrument for measuring such chasms and such distances. Thank God it was not so intended. Who wants to rely upon those persons of political and economic power who when we offer a candle of light in the darkness by which we can barely see hold in their hands the capacity to burst forth with such light that we will never see

again? Do we want to trust in their ability to sense some security beyond that of pressing a button and blinding us with more light than was ever intended? Who wants to rely upon those who say there must be this chasm between the haves and the have-nots? It matters not whether you speak Arabic or Hebrew, whether you speak Spanish or Korean or English. You all speak the language of pain in-between the haves and have-nots, the chasm between what is and what ought to be. Are we prepared to settle for this silos full of grain upon which we pay taxes? Do we want to rely upon those who say it just costs that much for Lockheed to retool and make this incredibly small plastic cap that goes on the bottom of a stool and goes in an airplane and costs a thousand dollars apiece and never blinked?

Indeed, advent comes to remind us we don't have any choice. We are exiled and alien from all that we are able to do as accomplishing our objective of humanness and of relationship to the almighty. We have not found in ourselves, in any of our kinds of engineering social, genetic, political or otherwise the instruments of reconciliation and peace. We are as they say at the end of our tether, at the end of our rope. We have no choice but to reach out desperately and cry for stable straw. That's all we can do. I remember George Buttreck suggesting to some of us at Southeastern that prayer was viewed by many as a crutch and he said, "Oh thank God for the crutch." Well, indeed is not that the admission that darkness is what prevails our hearts and minds and souls, and we love it more than light? Would that someone give me a crutch so that however feebly I limp it is out of that darkness, however small the candle, I will hold it steadfastly.

The advent comes with a cross squarely in front of the dove. This innocent child whom we revere and praise at this season of the year can hardly be called innocent. Consider if you will all the children that died for a fear-filled king's effort to crush Christianity before it ever started. How many of those Hebrew mothers followed the man of Nazareth when he became a preacher. Advent comes not as pure innocence but as innocence purchased at a price and so the cross is there. The only way it seems to me to understand the joy of advent is to understand the suffering and pain of darkness that we all endure.

Oh there is modest hope is there not. This morning on "Morning Edition" one of the favorite commentators on sports said he had watched *The Day After*. That had been very disheartening, but he said, I take heart because Cleveland has traded somebody to somebody else and has given them in exchange their second round draft choice in 1989. He said what a wonderful assumption that there will be a 1989. What is it in the face of darkness, in the face of a cross at advent that says in the mind of a senior I'm going to go to graduate school and get a Ph.D. and then I'm going to medical school and I'm going to work on alcoholism? I'm going to find a cure. There's got to be a clue there somewhere. Now what causes this person who lives in a world like this. Are his eyes blinded by the possibility of all that Nobel peace prize money? I think not. But what is it

in a freshman who says, "Well, Chaplain, you've given me enough to think about for the next seventy years." Because I'm having difficulty at fifty-four coping with that, she says, "I plan to live until I'm a hundred and seven so I can be there when they open that capsule in my hometown to see what's in it." Now this not a person overly naïve. It is a person who has worshipped here and likes the hymns that we sing and who somehow has grasped that straw, purchased at quite a price.

So the writer in second Isaiah called Deutero-Isaiah or Isaiah of the exile gives us a clue as to what that advent message is all about, the clue which seemingly was the one that Jesus picked up upon in his own ministry. Connection between this ancient prophecy of a person long ago and far away from himself and from his people who had a vision. This vision strangely enough did take into account the extent of sin as principality and power of evil and darkness because it imagines a God big enough and large enough and powerful enough to say of all the nations, you are a drop in the bucket. You are as almost nothing. This God goes beyond Sagan's telescope. This God is the cosmos behind and through and in all cosmoses. This God is beyond reach, beyond comprehension. Yet the vision of second Isaiah is those things you have heard and those things you have not heard, you will understand how ridiculous, how marvelously appropriate for our circumstance that this Job-like picture of God in Isaiah is large enough and powerful enough and majestic enough and mysterious enough to come to terms with the evil that men love more than light. But Isaiah says that the one who invades our life with this power pays the price.

Quietly sometimes in one of the vision songs, this servant comes, this suffering servant comes and suffers in quietness, never seems to be overwhelmed or appalled by anything that is said or done. In another of the servant psalms it says it is as if this servant rose every morning and God spoke in the servant's ear and said back to the courthouse of humanity. There is legislation there. There is the prosecution of evil. There is the proclamation of good. Don't give up. Keep going at it. The servant would say yes, Lord but they spat upon me yesterday. They have humiliated me time after time. They've laughed at this light, this absurdity of which I speak. The Lord said, I know. Back to the courthouse. Then some strange notion that this steadfastness, this preaching of justice is the preaching of true religion, true religion. Oh how we Christians seems to not be able to discern what that is. For one of the said sights in our time is Christian versus Christian over the issue of true religion. Who are the true believers? Some of us have not even read *1984*. But the prophecy says that message will be there. That splash of light will invade the darkness and this is incredible confidence that this is true. But it doesn't have much to go on, and finally, finally the vision that Brian read for us is of nations dumbfounded and speechless because this silent power like a volcano erupts all over the place. This power is more power than power. It envisions something that has not been seen, heard or felt before. For suddenly all the people see enough to realize that we never paid

for our sins and our broken promises, our willful neglect, our omissions, our lack of appreciation of love, our relentless warfare against hatred and indifference that we have taken the higher road, which was the easier road. Suddenly this suffering servant bears all that, is all of that, all of that alienation, all that loneliness, all that fear, all that alienation from God is measured in stripes upon his back. Whether you view it as personal or corporate, whatever, the suffering servant in Isaiah Fifty-three is something new under the sun and everyone is left to ponder and to wonder. You mean that the rough places will be made straight, that family discord somehow will be dealt with. Do you mean to say that the mountains will be made lower? Somehow those () mountains will become food for people who are hungry. Do you mean that there will be such a joy and calling out of exaltation that nations will not war against nation? Oh what a desperate grasping for straw and for cross. Yes, we do that and God sings God's carillon song and God finds ways to get the message through.

In that movie *The Day After* there really was one thing that I will remember and that is the song that was hymn-like played at the end, and I found out that it was written by someone. It's called *The River*. That's a beautiful song. It gives me another image. Advent invites us to plunge ourselves into the river. We are not to quit. We are not to resign. We are to acknowledge the darkness and spit upon it with our modest little light and plunge in as if there is enough breath in God's messenger, the suffering servant to keep us afloat. Maybe we see a star, and maybe the rhythms of this season are to a different drummer. Maybe it makes perfectly good sense to keep your Lovefeast candle for each year and then hope that you can explain that to your grandchildren. They'll say what are you talking about Granddaddy? Why are you keeping all these beeswax candles? A person gives another person the wreath that's handmade. Some people make bread. Some people give hugs and hot cider. Some people almost make war over which of those early ornaments are going to be hung where on the tree. Most of all it's music. Is it not music that conveys somehow that power and that light that by his stripes we are healed? Somehow the brokenness is resolved. Somehow something new is under the sun, and so the references to healing begin with the one in Revelation about nations and in Peter about people, and that is the call of advent, stark, mysterious and powerful, beyond comprehension and yet the only game in town. So we would say joy to the world for beyond the curses and all the sin is the wonder of God's love. END

Chapel Sermon 1/19/84

ED CHRISTMAN: You are invited to come and see God in human form, and to see God in the gospel of John is to see God in ways that are not present in the other gospel accounts. The emphasis entirely is upon various natural and earthy things like food and drink, sight and blindness. Some people respond to this strange new person who does not apparently seem to care

what people believe but whether or not they can see. Some respond because of signs, marvelous unusual sights, attributed to or that they actually witnessed themselves. Others because they are desperate. They have asked what is new in town, and there aren't any new games. There has been the religion of their past. There has been caution which prevents them from taking any risks and made easier by the tyranny of wrong; and therefore, some out of desperation and curiosity and boredom when the words come follow me, they say why not. Nothing else going on. I don't know why. I have no reasons. I have no beliefs. I just have a feeling, and I will, if I might use this current phrase, follow my feelings. Now the burden of this brief sermon is to suggest that we ought to all follow our feelings and that in a university community we are very afraid to do that and ironically religiously speaking it is both conservatives and liberals who contribute to our reluctance. It is conservatives' fear of the spirit of God, being poured out all over the place, uncontrolled in Pentecostal and charismatic terms, out of reach or like a nuclear explosion. It is likewise liberals who have programmed how it is that you respond with ideas and with certain civil rights and other kinds of noble social gospel activities. If you do not follow either the conservative model of getting all your doctrines straight or the liberal model of getting all your activities and programs laudable and praiseworthy to change the world, there is something unconscionable or strange about someone saying, follow your feelings.

Now no one sermon is to say it all, but it seems to me that the gospel of John says it very clearly that insofar as we can perceive what the good news is, it has to do with our feelings. It has to do with being desperate enough or curious enough or impressed enough with certain things that we have seen that we will respond and will keep on asking our questions and look for answers down the road and that that is precisely the dynamic of what it means to be a Christian. One who is in that sense working out his or her salvation with fear and trembling over a very long period of time with many hesitations and with many confusions and with many doubts. Consider the plight of the disciples. I say plight because these were persons that were perhaps better prepared than we with our sophistication or pseudo-sophistication to follow Jesus Christ who offered these simple remedies for their circumstance of not having enough to eat and not having enough to drink. He says, I can take care of that. He says, I can take care of blindness and I can take care of illness of all kinds. Maybe somehow they could understand that he wasn't really talking about food and he wasn't talking about sight and he wasn't talking about illness. But you see they come to be very much like collegians and poll takers because in spite of raising someone from the dead and giving a man sight who'd been blind for his entire life, in spite of healing a person at some great distance and having one fantastic lake side fish fry [laughter] for five thousand people catered by a fellow named Andrew and a kid from Burger King and the strange host, in spite of all these things, in spite of all the declarations I am going to prepare a place for you and everything is all right. The kingdom of God is here. In spite of all that they said yes, but we're not sure

whether John the writer of this book is going to die or not. We want a little final PS about that. Let's clear up that detail. The writer of this book is so honest enough as to have Jesus turn to the disciples and say in light of all that's happened, in light of all that has happened, what is it to you whether one person lives or dies in the flesh? Come on persons. Haven't you got any sense at all about what you see? Or do you understand folks that I am a salesman, he says. I am a salesman. Now what I am selling is unwrapped. It's right here. There are no ribbons or fancy—there isn't any ribbon or fancy paper. It's flesh and blood. I'm right here. Oh by the way I am God. It may come as something of a surprise to you. But keep on looking. There was something about that salesman because you see he was so bloody confident. He didn't do these things out in the wilderness somewhere. He said, where's the action. It's in Jerusalem. He said, why don't we make a mud pie and put it on somebody's face right there. Let's go to the pool where all the lame people are. Let's do something right there. He did these things publicly. He made these declarations of who he was in the presence of fishermen and politicians. He didn't seem to mind it being the salesman in public where everyone could ask the questions now of who or what's going on. Characteristically he caused a lot of confusion, a lot of dissent. There were a lot of seminars on Jesus according to the gospel of John because we couldn't quite figure it out intellectually, and with our reasoning powers we didn't have a clue.

The persons for whom we should be far more sympathetic than we have been were the scholars of the day or at least some of them. They were called Pharisees. We like to rail against them. Yet we seem to be blind to the fact that they really had a problem. They had such clarity that this kind of clarity made them blind. They couldn't see because they really were good people and they had done a lot of deep thinking and earnest feeling. But suddenly the word Messiah takes on a flesh and blood definition that they cannot comprehend. What bothers them is that some of their own kind have decided to lay aside what they cannot comprehend and follow and say, well, I'll go on and I'm sure I'll get some help. There will be an advanced course somewhere I can take by the Sea of Galilee or someplace to find out what it is that's making me follow other than just if you'll pardon the expression, a gut feeling.

The salesman was confident. He did what he did in public without reservation and with enormous clarity and response to questions he was not a contemporary politician running for office. He said this is who I am. Take it or leave it. Unlike some salesman he just gave you a choice. He didn't insist except that you pay attention. Of course he got frustrated when he said, look, you've been around me for quite some time, but you still don't seem to be able to see. One of the most profound observations he said the people who were born with sight are all blind and this man who never has seen can see. He's the only theologian in the group. He said, I don't know who he is. All I know is I was blind and now I see. His family punted. They couldn't handle that. Well, he's old enough to make his own decisions, which translated meant, we don't know

what's going on either. We certainly don't want to be thrown out of the synagogue. Talk to him. He's old enough to vote and go to war, and he's old enough apparently to be a theologian. But he is acting very much like a child who just says, wow. Incredible. I think I'll hang around. That's seemingly what the disciples found themselves having to do.

So the salesman says something to them about bread and about wine and about light and darkness, and it all is in the context of a sacrament. Suddenly he is trying to invite us very suddenly and without any pretext to assume that life is a gift. Notice how the Lord's supper is dealt with in this gospel not nearly as formally as it is elsewhere. It's partially that lakeside fish fry. Then when it comes to the real thing, he winds up spending more time washing fish than serving the elements. But the elements. Oh the elements. Once in this chapel at a Maundy Thursday service I began to talk about the flesh and the blood of Jesus Christ. There was a youngster here who having grown up in a place like this, full of rationality and clear empirical understanding of everything, turned to his dad and said, I'm not drinking nobody's blood. Why of course not. But would that that child's imagination could be quickened to the point that life could be seen as sacramental and that every gift is one that to which we are to respond. We're to follow and give the thanks that we can give whether that means to be a deep thinker, whether it means to dance, whether it means to compose music or draw, whether it means to go and be a missionary in Togo or Puerto Rico or in East Winston. It means to go and to do and to see as much light as one can see and that's all one can see. But Jesus said there's just terrible problems. It seems that the only way you get the sight that is sufficient to energize you to move off of your duff is if you see one series of slam-dunks after another. One reverse slam-dunk on Tuesday won't do it. I'm waiting for Tyrone Bogues to do that. Got to have them and Jesus said that it's not that signs that we pile up. He said, have you read the first part of this book. It says grace is stacked up on grace. Don't be afraid. So you stumble. So you fall. So the light is modest. Move, follow, come and see. Don't be afraid. Don't stand around waiting for all the propositions to get in place. Don't assume that when you are converted or when you make a decision about a vocation someone hands you a rule book and tells you now to be a Christian means one, two, three four or twenty-four or 564 things to do and be like. No, we don't have time it says. The urgency of this invitation by this incredible host, Jesus says it's now. It's right now.

Some came to chapel because they made a promise to their parents at Christmas to be more religious second semester. Some came because they felt sorry for the chaplain who'd been writing all these bloody notes on these cards. [laughter] Some came because they wanted to find out about a class and a teacher from somebody they thought might be here. Some people came wondering whether or not we did have any banners that we had. That's the right banner for the season. That's the banner of Jesus breaking out and beyond what he had learned and what he had known and inviting Jew

and gentile, old and young to do the same. He said right now, now we can worry about the kingdom of God being out yonder. He said no, it's right now and it's right here and it's flesh and it's blood and it's decision time. It's decision time, time not to say well, it wouldn't be a good idea. I think I'll wait until spring break. I think I'll wait until after the ACC tournament. I mean or I'll wait until I've got a major or I'll wait until I fall in love or I'll wait, and Jesus said the invitation is standing. It's for everyone, and the time for you to respond is now. So you see he opens the door and instead of coming in, he just walks away. You've got to say hey, where are you going? You need to follow or you don't follow. You need to follow some gut feeling, some sense of there's a little bit of sight or there's enough light for me to see or you stand there and wait for the rational equipment to go to work and to catch up and to give you reasons. None of the disciples that followed Jesus Christ wound up with any reasons. They wound up finding out that those waiting for slam-dunks wind up being servants who are slam-dunked themselves. There's no assurance Jesus said. Now he did surprise them when they tried to go fishing after they thought he had quit. He winds up cooking fish and chips breakfast for them, and he started talking about feeding lambs and sheep. What he was really saying was God so loved the world, the whole world, that we would like some people to accept this invitation to feed the sheep and to love and care. Time to do that is now. Jesus suggests that those of us who are addicted to caution are in need of a miracle. We're in need of a sign. But he would suggest that those who are addicted to caution remember the few times in their life when something unusual and very powerful happened to them. It could have happened in this chapel. It could have happened at the love feast. It could've happened in a class. It could've happened in a residence hall room. It could've happened anywhere. Something you remember and later on that thing that happened back there that didn't seem to have so much significance it now becomes a very large and incarnate sign of what life's all about. The disciples had that recollection. Jesus had made this incredible prediction about the temple, and then when it came time for passion and resurrection, he said, oh yeah. The invitation is to the cautious to get over their addiction. The invitation is for us to see life as sacramental so that anything and everything that has happened is a possible sign of the presence of God inviting you and me to draw, to paint, to be, to care, to do.

Do we not think that we know how it is people deal with alcoholism. How do they deal with alcoholism? They deal with it by saying I quit! And they do that usually with the help of others. They do that because they have somehow gotten beyond the simplicity of what it is that's gotten them addicted and is causing them to live in darkness and despair and be blind and has given them light. Usually that's other people. Jesus spent a great deal of time with his disciples because they were going to have to lean on each other and help each other and support each other. But he kept saying the time is now, and toward the end he did something, which I frankly have no real understanding. He breathed into them the spirit of God

and said, now you can forgive sins. Well, I think that to forgive sins in that case simply meant to keep on following in spite of all the arguments and reasons and apprehensions that any of them and all of them had.

I say it's now quite frankly because three of your peers have died violently in less than a year. Now those of you who have been to a statistics class at Wake Forest can relax. I mean after all three thousand undergraduates, and only three have died in less than a year. The odds are good. I'll live three score and ten or four score as the Good Book says. Then you've misunderstood the whole point of what it means to say come and see because the time is now. The grief expressed here in this chapel yesterday afternoon by a student was that one of his peers can only now in that sense live if other people love because he's not going to have that opportunity as we understand it. He has had to go ahead and claim God's promise of an ultimate kingdom not made with hands. But this one need not be made with hands. It can be made with energy that moves us out of our pew and away from our desk and away from whatever it is that makes us so over cautious that we always quote counting cost and figuring out if it's good idea.

The miracles of this time and the miracles of a university community would be that the conservatives and the liberals would quit if you'll pardon the expression pussyfooting. Thank you Governor Wallace. Quit pussy-footing and decide that without consulting one's roommate, without consulting one's parents or one's chaplain or one's anybody, Jesus Christ has come and said, I would like to invite you to one fantastic fish fry. It's going on all the time, and there are all kinds of ways to act it out and to be that kind of person. Yeah, this is a sermon inviting you to be a preacher and a missionary and a teacher and a plumber, but let's be very specific. Why not assume that the conversion to becoming a Christian and that act that some of us have taken to become professional Christians is really almost exactly the same act at a different stage of our lives. Why not assume that some of you ought to update your sign language with Jesus Christ? Is it not this the time and is it not this the place?

Last semester a student's eyes told me of a sermon has made a difference and he was going to do something about that. Yesterday following a memorial service, the student says to me, how am I going to do something with myself? I want to do something. I said, "If you can sense the presence of God, somehow you'll know." He'll know in here, in here, somehow. It's not up here. The mind will somehow find a way to follow and justify even the irrational behavior of a Christian who follows Jesus Christ. How would I dare end such an invitation to discipleship, such a recovery of one's sight or the acquisition of the sight in the presence of so much darkness and so much blindness and so much carefulness. Well, I'll do it in the spirit of the offering, the sacramental offering of music and dance. Here it is. [singing—to the tune of *Simple Gifts*] Dance then

wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the Dance said he. I will lead you on whomever you may be. I will lead you on in the dance, come see. END

Chapel Sermon 3/29/84

ED CHRISTMAN: I remember the day I was born. It was such a beautiful, sparkling, sun shiny day. At least that's what some applications of people coming to Wake Forest have actually said. Naturally we chuckle, but there is the real likelihood that they are telling the truth at least if they can rely upon their parents and others to have recalled and remembered that day, which obviously they cannot recall with their own consciousness. But birth of brothers and sisters makes us know that this is a beautiful day. Birth of other persons is a time of innocence and of excitement and celebration. Indeed in some communions persons take those small infants and they are baptized in a font and actually the parents are affirmed and the church pledges its affirmation. In other denominations an infant can be carried to the church in a dedication service of the parents in which the church partake. Again say this is a day and this is a time worth remembering. Indeed one of the oldest portions of scripture has to do with the birth of a nation, the nation of Israel, and it is sung by Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. Behold we will sing praises under the Lord this day for he has won a great victory. The horses and riders have been drowned in the sea. At her exaltation is not unlike the exaltation of two other women who were kinswomen, one named Elizabeth who bore John the forerunner of Jesus, and Mary, the mother of our Lord. They too celebrated. They too knew that something special, indeed something unique, had occurred. It was then a bright and glorious day whether it was raining or not. They could see the meaning somehow of this event. Do we not not only recall birth as something we remember and relish in some respects. But we recall those earlier experiences in which perhaps we heard the word of the Lord preached. We somehow experienced it at the dinner table, and so we came forth and we joined the church.

We sat in a car as I did at Hemming Park in Jacksonville, Florida and my mother asked me the questions from the shorter catechism. And I recall at Sunday school paying the seventy-five cents, which allowed me to put one more little square representing a brick on our Sunday school building that was being paved. Oh how we could remember and relish those days of seventy-five cent bricks. But it was something to remember, the conversation with the minister, the standing at the front of the church with my parents each of whom making a decision, not altogether the same, but a decision of importance, a kind of conversion, a kind of affirmation, a confirmation, a reaffirmation of earlier births and earlier experiences of being part of the body of Christ. Indeed Jesus had a recollection too being baptized by his kinsmen immersed

in the affairs of men and women, not to be laid aside as if he were some strange spook who had come to inhabit this place by his own terms but had come on our terms to be a part of who and what we were. Yes, that baptism, did John remember it later on? Of course he remembered. Of course he remembered the Jordan and many persons, and he remembered this person for somehow out of his knowledge or his instinct or his sense of things, he blurted out Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

So what do you remember? What do you remember of your religious experience? Indeed of the absence of it while you were growing up. What do you remember about baptism or confirmation? Do you remember the time or do you remember the place and do you remember the people? Well, in John's gospel, Jesus speaking to his disciples shortly before his betrayal, trial, crucifixion and his resurrection. Shortly before that he tries to collect those experiences and urge upon his disciples that they remember that they remember what he had said about the temple. He said it can be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. It was only later that they could remember. But something made them pay attention to that statement he had earlier made, and then later they were able to connect it. They were able to make a connection, which was truly strange, for the question had been asked can any good thing come out of Nazareth, rephrase for us, can any good thing come out of Chapel Hill? The answer yes. Yes, as imponderable and difficult as it might be to see, no more difficult for them to conceive that this prophet, this person who John the forerunner had called the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Yes, out of Nazareth, out of Chapel Hill, out of Burgaw and out of the Toms River, New Jersey, the Lord God can come forth. Therefore, it behooves us to remember those times and those places and those people who have somehow had something to do with showing us the light, showing us the water, showing us the pathway.

Indeed President Reagan perhaps could use a little help in this regard. He seems to think that the only thing people remember from high school is calculus and advanced placement tests. My experience with many of you and your predecessors is that since the Supreme Court decision, which said there shall be no official prayers prescribed and announced over loud speaker systems, since that time, my recollection is that many of you remember that religious experiences actually took place in high school. But I shouldn't expect our dear president to be all that sensitive to the religious community. I'm certainly aware of how sensitive he is to how to get elected, but I do suspect that he doesn't understand that people remember not necessarily perfunctory prayers that are prescribed. I guess he doesn't realize that some of us know that people have been and continue to pray in school, continue to find ways to share their faith with each other and they remember, and when they come to college and go beyond, they can recollect those experiences.

Can you recollect your sins? Does this general confession on Thursday and do the prayers that you say and the other prayers that you utter, sermons that you hear preached remind you of your sins? Do they help you recall the sins that are more than the commercial that says Mommy's mad at me because I didn't brush my teeth. Can we get a little further down the road than that kind of sense of our wrongdoing? Can we not sense some connection with Jesus and his cantation for indeed if there were not some remembrance of the mighty acts of God, some sense of the order of life, some sense of its rightness, some sense of light and hope and life, there wouldn't be any temptation. Temptation is based on the assumption that there is a right path, that there is a way to proceed. That there is a vine and that there are branches. Was Jesus temptation that he might fail and that he was tempted really to succeed and to win a victory even if in fact it was short lived. Was Jesus tempted to find some way to make people understand and see against their will? Apparently Jesus was able to resist the temptations of gusto, the temptations of greed and power, the temptation to misdirect his message and patiently to persist in signs and miracle stories and questions designed to help us remember who we are and yes, to remember our own failures. For do we not individually and collectively have a disposition to dispose of ourselves and of others, and therefore to deny God's gift of life from birth and through baptism and confirmation to treat it lightly. Do we not have a disposition to be indifferent to that gift, to let time pass as if it is of no consequence, to allow opportunity to slip through our fingers? Are we not somehow to dispose, not to be imaginative enough to figure out what to do with excess wheat and corn? Just why is it brothers and sisters that we are so disposed to the way economy has always been, a sound economy, that we cannot hear the cries of hunger, cannot hear those sounds, cannot say there is some way we can change this disposition to cling to the past in a way things have been done economically out of some fear. Yes, that's your burden and it's mine individually and collectively. Do we not remember our sin, obsession with national security and denominational security, that makes us internationally and religiously insecure?

Why then can we not somehow take seriously the wonderful opportunity to deal with those sins. Oh yes, those sins are dealt with in this responsive reading because it is here that we find out how the vine that nourishes us, how the vine helps us deal with those sins, those failures, those fears, that obsession with gusto and greed. The bridge from there to here is to remember one of the more flamboyant of the Old Testament characters. His name of course is David, and David was a man of such talents to succeed and fail. He was in some sense an Old Testament version of Peter because he was there always exposed, never concealed, always somehow involved and participating and in that sense not tempted to take life lightly. In the course of his time the scene in Chronicles is of him bringing that covenant box with its promises of God and setting it before the people and rejoicing, singing and dancing as was his oft intention as a way of expressing his love for God

and his obedience to God. He said remember the acts of the Lord. Remember what God has done for us and you will be able to clap your hands and imagine that the trees are clapping their branches somehow. Remember what God has promised. Survive day by day. That's the best that David could do. This person whose life is chartered by a course of sin, failure is also chartered by enough fruit bearing so that we remember create in me oh God a clean heart and mind and spirit. Renew within me, day by day, allow me enough water and enough food and enough nourishment from the vine to survive because somehow in this covenant box he said there is hope. There is the promise that Lord you will not be like I am. Thank God you will not. You will be dependable. You can count on you to continue to nourish me.

Indeed what does nourish us. It's the same thing that nourished David. It is that music. Why is it that certain weeks I take the time to look up in an encyclopedia of music something about some the hymns that we sing. It is because if I can make a connection with Isaac Watts, somehow I feel that I am being nourished by the same vine that nourished his capacity to feel what Jesus was all about. If I can make a connection with a Gregorian chant, I don't have to know all of them to know that that was a marvelous form of thanksgiving unto the Lord. If I can somehow encourage and remind you that many of those hymns were written in his twenties. What is it that I am saying to you branches of the vine? I am suggesting that fruit-bearing time is now. Jesus was talking to the disciples about vine and branches, not about some future time, talking about now. What music do you write? What words, what lyrics, what sounds do you put together that somehow crystallize the sense of nourishment and remind us of the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century of John Calvin and Geneva and Martin Luther, ages past. Why do we sing new songs from the supplement? How grateful I am for the fact that some of them are difficult that you still sing them because these are modern efforts at fruit bearing by persons who want to tell the story. The one we just sang tells the entire story of what it means to be feeding sheep and loving one another, keeping the commandments of the Lord. Peter do you love me? Well, then you'll do what it says and sings in supplement number forty-seven. That's what he was saying. There is some kind of connection which would nourish us.

But the beauty of John's gospel is not only do you find it in very dramatic art forms, works of art and music and in painting and in sculpture, but you find it in simple things. You find it in tables. You find it in plays like *Dining Room*. What an incredibly simple and poignant idea? The whole play revolving around a table and succeeding different groups of persons and how that table was either the source of joy or sorrow, the source of strength or weakness, the source of fulfillment or the source of emptiness. One table and the audience is allowed to sit back and look and imagine themselves, and it was impossible at least for me not to remember our dining room table. The things that happened there and other tables and other times when persons, young married couples, students, older people, all kinds of folks gathered around the table. It is

only in remembering somehow that those events and those occasions somehow connect up to what we call the very expressed religious events in our lives, the times of confirmation, the times of reaffirmation of our faith.

Now yesterday I was called by a reporter, and this morning she called which I greatly appreciate to find out if she was going to quote me directly. That's a marvelous act of responsibility. She read me what she had written about what I said. It was correct but she had, in the midst of this long conversation, left out something that for me was very important. This is an article about a trek to the old campus. I told her it was not a pilgrimage in some religious sense because that place is not a shrine. But it is a trek. Now what did she leave out that I thought had to be put in. I said however even though it's not a pilgrimage and it is a trek, it is analogous to what the Bible and religions, all religions, call upon us to do and that is to remember, to remember times and place and seasons and make connections with them. So she was glad to put that in. Our religious history is based upon the ability of persons to remember and discern what somehow can resonate with another age and another time and another place. In my experience it is always important to see whether or not there is some religious connection between that wall that was built around the campus. In that house that is over a hundred and fifty years old, can I in any sense connect with that place? Could any of us who ever have been to Jerusalem somehow feel some sense of what it was like two thousand years ago or to swim in the Sea of Galilee and imagine somehow what went on there or the River Jordan or to visit Saint Peter's or Saint Paul's or some small church in Zermatt, Switzerland and sort of understand what that means. Jesus is saying to his disciples and to the branches of the vine whether you live in the first or the twentieth century, keep your eyes open, make all the treks that you can to all the places and deal with all the persons who in any sense can help you understand what is it that lasts and who is it that lasts and how is it that they last. How are the connections made? Are they made by those people we used to laugh at when I was in school because they were so ashamed of it we all thought they were overly romantic because, you see, they wrote in diaries, diaries. It must be for people who are very lonely, somehow can't make it in the real world being in commerce with others. But now strangely enough diaries are in. They're called journals. Journal writing and trying to reflect and trying to remember has become very, very important. Why not. The age in which we live is asunder. It's shattered in so many respects. So many of the tables that were the places of family gathering are no longer there. So many of the symbols, so many of the things we believed in and values we thought were in place have somehow vaporized or fragmented themselves in ways that no longer give us the sense of nourishment and connection. Yet perhaps we have also lost some of those symbols of the past and of the present that lead us in the wrong direction. So that we are not freer in our desperation not to pray glibly but to pray somewhat gravely, to walk backward in history with our prayer, to thank God for those mighty acts as David did. To go beneath the surface, to not be afraid to be alone whether we

are twenty or fifty, to somehow let events and people stir us and to see and to keep looking out a window and at your own face and other persons and say what is there, what is the connection, what do I owe to other persons.

Last week standing here was Anne Hensel and she was preaching, a woman preaching ordained of God to answer the question what does it mean to bear fruit. What does it mean to feed the sheep and the lambs? Why of course I know that that term is not limited to food for the people who are hungry. I know that it does have to include that for the connections of prayer and scripture are usually related to some acts of kindness and concern that amount to that prayer taking living shape. Anne Hensel struggles with those awesome scripture passages. Indeed in the language of the computer world, the software of the gospel is very hard. In the language of computers we've got the megabytes. We've got all the megabytes we need. Eight million or more on the simple computation of 1024 times twenty-four times eight. Over eight million. Jesus megabyte mainframe, it's there. The structure is there. The printout is there. It is awesome. It is inviting. It is frightening. But I ask you, what are our choices? Are we going to persist in believing in our lucky stars? Come now. Astrology is a marvelous diversion and fad. I like to know a little bit about it from time to time. Yes, I know what sign I am born under. I don't think that amounts to anything at all in terms of what lasts and am I somehow lasting because of spontaneous combustion? No, our dear friend on channel four with his billions and billions of years. That's interesting. So is Albert Camus interesting? And *The Stranger* interesting and not worth terribly much? We're not self-starters? There is no spontaneous combustion which lasts in ourselves or in others. There is no single idea at least from a Christian, Judeo-Christian point of view that in any sense compares with the nourishing value of the vine. We do have to look not only to those sort of epochal experiences of birth and confirmation and conversion and renewal.

Yes, that happened to me while I was in college. The sense of the design of my life is not completed at Hemming Park with the shorter catechism of Presbyterian Church or taking communion in that very large and imposing place where the communion bread was cut in little square crosses and little squares that were almost like crosses. That's very fascinating at age five. I remember that. But I remember that in college there were changes. There was pruning. There was the need to be willing to say no and to say yes and to not be afraid. So it was that in college some very important things happened to me religiously. What's happening to you? What has happened to you? What has happened to your professors? What's happening to them? Are they being allowed somehow to just be there? Or I would say to the students here, have you in any sense been alive enough to challenge them and inspire them to continue to grow and to be pruned and to bear fruit. Yes, we assume that they too are trying to grow and to bear fruit and they know that those lectures. You see there are not as many as there were. Once you reach the life stage at which I've reached you begin to say with Buddy Hackett, I don't know what it

means to say that in one's fifties you're in the prime of life. You're at mid-life. He says how many people do you know that are 114? No, that's not mid-life. Most of it in terms that we know it is down the tube. Jesus said, that's okay. If you will persist in remembering those events, those simple ordinary events and those very dramatic occasions that have shaped your life and given it nourishment. So he encouraged the disciples, not to make head counts, not to spend all of their time getting their formulas correct but to respond to the command, feed my sheep in all the ways that you can feed. Love one another and in so doing you will keep my commandments. Yes, it is not pleasant to know that there is a division in this story between those that throw their lives away and are cut off by their choice of throwing their lives away. But you see all of us are chosen. We're all given the opportunity to let our vines be intertwined with others and in so doing be connected. Let all the branches that we are be connected to that one vine.

Why should we remember the vine? The Jesus of birth and of baptism and cantation and question asking. Why should we remember? Well, of course that vine remembered us in so many ways even when we were and are of the tribe of Thomas, still looking for a head count, still looking for proof. Lord show us the father—[recording stopped] END

Chapel Sermon Spring 1984?

ED CHRISTMAN: 1,933 students have a board plan. By the end of the term there will be approximately 2,300 students on the board plan, a functional and meaningful relationship between equals in which you see what you get day by day. You know exactly where you stand, and if at the outset you are not sure, there is flexibility between heavy and light eaters, between those who want to have extra money to cater birthday parties and those who will spend many weekends away. A functional and successful plan with only one caveat and that is there is no carry over to next semester. Well, you see you need not worry about that either because dear freshmen friends there are upper classmen who know that your parents have over purchased for you, and they stand around at the best there is of free enterprise waiting for the right moment. [laughter] Now of course if they are genuine Christians, they will buy at face value [laughter], but by the grace of God we know about free enterprise. So at a discount you will serve them a meal or two, but alas good freshmen next year you can recoup. Such a plan makes sense because it is a clear relationship to provide a specific amount of food in various locations for a certain time period. For that reason it works and the only stipulation is this business of no carry over to next semester. But you will manage that. It is a well negotiated, well thought out plan for food at least for some of the food that we need to eat.

There is one connection, this carry over feature with another plan we shall call the wilderness plan. Once upon a time there were a group of persons wandering around in a strange and stark place, and they did not even know why all

together they were wondering and wandering. They paid nothing for their food. But they didn't get a great deal either. They got only one kind, and there was no collection of twenty or more food establishments within walking distance of their wilderness place. They got this food daily and there was to be no carry over except in preparation for the Sabbath day. Indeed when they did not believe that that was true and they tried to gather extra it rotted in their very hands. They were in truth the wilderness people on a wilderness plan living hand to mouth, one day at a time.

Their mouth was good for one other thing than eating. It was good for murmuring. They did not like their plan, and they couldn't get to the chef. He seemed distant and powerful and fearsome, and in various forms he would appear, but they really couldn't get at him as you might be able to go to Slater to complain. They could only get to his primary bus boy, that fine talented and sometimes fearsome Moses. They could murmur against him, and murmuring mind you was not simply a complaint about the menu. It was a desire to kill him for as they lived and as they wandered about in this desert where they were faced with the reality of their own dependency upon each other and upon this sticky food that would come as the morning dew. They were not only ready to dispatch Moses. They had hidden away some agenda that suggested we can somehow do better. We will find our way back to serfdom in the fleshpots of Egypt. There we will eat and drink our fill.

Indeed their murmurings to kill another would also suggest that their diet and their plan and their seeming lack of purpose meant they would have as well dispatched themselves. For this was a plan that was unacceptable. It was uneven. It was conceived by someone else and they did not understand what it was to say you are the children of God. Well, they did figure out that the only way they survived was not in a one on one board plan like many, if not most of you, have. They survived this time and this reality and this deprivation of their freedom, which was ironically called freedom. They survived it by singing songs and occasionally surprising themselves by even praising and thanking the chef for what food he did give and for their own company and their jokes and their laughter and their tears and their ability to mend each others' garments against the stark realities of the weather in which they had to endure.

They somehow were a group, a group of sufferers and a group of murmurers and a group of persons who ate manna and then asked themselves what else is Moses chewing on. He seems to be eating something else. Give us this day our daily bread meant more than manna. He was chewing on something, and at those moments when they were not murmuring and complaining, they too chewed upon Moses' morsel. It was the promise. It was the hope. It was the realization that finite human beings can do no other than either turn against God or accept God's board plan no matter what its shape or its dimension. A promise and a hope. They were bound for a Promised Land.

Some of you know about Outward Bound and within its limits, just like the Wake Forest board plan, it is to be praised for it asks an individual to define one's own limits. It asks an individual to savor the food that he or she has and the implements that have been given. It asks the individual to respect the world around him or her. It asks the individual to ask themselves who and what am I in the midst of all this. It is a discipline. You are bound by the discipline, and it can have great meaning and value for those who endure. But I have not seen anywhere any brochure from any of the Outward Bound companies saying come join Outward Bound for forty years. That doesn't seem to be a practical value deduced from Outward Bound for three days or for a summer. The plan as presently constituted is realistic and takes into account the human condition. Not even the leaders of Outward Bound would genuinely covenant for forty years.

Nor did those who were in the desert. They were gathered together and they were led out in a () and marshy swamp and into a Sinai Peninsula that was unbelievably unbelievable. The days went on one at a time and they knew not whence they had come because now they seemed unable to return and they certainly knew not where they were going unless they could chew on Moses' morsel of food. There is a promise. There is a hope and God is present to us even in this mundane food that we eat and even in this loose fellowship that we have of songs that we sing and jokes that we tell and stories we remember from the past. We somehow are together and we will somehow make it. At least that was their hope, and they had come to the realization that to be otherwise was to be dead. To be otherwise was to pretend they could be that which they were not. What a priced board plan.

Bobby read to you a part of the sixth chapter of John, and whomever the writer of John was could have as easily written the Lord's prayer give us this day or daily bread and smile because if John does one thing more than anything else. This matchless writer indicates to us that most words of substance may have more than one meaning and though you grasp for the manna, also understand there is a promise. Give us each day Lord enough of that promise that we will truly survive. In this chapter Jesus is building upon the story of his encounter with the woman of Samaria who first thought that he meant good H₂O and then discovered somehow without her really knowing how she discovered it that this person she was talking to was someone who was doing more than talking about her own personal lifestyle. She said he was a prophet. Now of course in the sixth chapter these good people who were talking with Jesus and trying to learn what in the world he was all about and where he was bound. They in effect said of him, well, Lord and would be prophet we demand of you what we do of all prophets. Do us a sign. Until your credentials are established Nazarene, do us just one more sign. All the board plan that we have to involve ourselves in is complicated by our circumstance. In a way it would've been simpler to have been in the explicit wilderness of Sinai, but is it not possible for us to present before this congregation a suggestion that there is a

wilderness even for the beautiful people. There is a wilderness in this beautiful and laudable place. There is a possibility of loneliness. There is a possibility of feeling cut off and alien and helpless. Yea verily it is possible here to fail in a variety of ways. Is it not possible then to suggest that there is some connection between that wilderness and the possibility of our own if for no other reason than to come to the realization that wilderness means dependency upon something other than ourselves.

But our nourishment here is academic, and it means food and it means signs. It means some demonstration professor that you really can do it one more time, that you can teach in such a way that I can learn and be blessed by that learning and can take that learning into the marketplace of the world and gain yea verily even more and greater variety of foods to eat and things to drink. One more sign we ask of our professors. One more sign we ask of our peers just one more time good roommate and friend. Do not disappoint me one more time. Always be on time. Always be trustworthy. Never fail. Prove it to me day after day after day, and then I'll go believe you are my friend and my peer, and I will respect you because you have won the gold, not the silver. You haven't finished eleventh. Does anyone know who finished eleventh in the marathon among the men or the women? Why of course not. That's not the right sign. Jesus ignored their demand for a sign, and he said you worked too hard for the wrong kind of reward. You assume that if because you are talented and because you are able to afford, or someone is, your being here that you can win the prize. If you work hard enough, you will get the results.

There were persons in the library yesterday. I don't minimize. I celebrate that. Provided the persons that were there and the persons that will be there later on in the semester when it will look like a traffic jam right before quiz and paper time, provided those persons yesterday and weeks from now will understand the kind of food they are getting and the rewards they should expect. We'll not confuse them those gifts, those achievements with anything like Moses' morsel of promised hope and future life. Behold Jesus said pay attention to what you say and to what you do with the gifts that have been given. Savor the food that is yours to give. Don't gulp it down for indeed the little food gives you the strength to seek other kinds of nourishment here in this place. Well you might and well you might be disciplined to that task and celebrate that opportunity, but mind you all those things that you do and all those things you learn will rot away. They have limited value, value but it is of a certain order of things.

Then he said in response to your pleading about a sign and the manna, Moses was a bus boy. He didn't give you anything that is to your ancestors. He was one of them. But somehow or other he came to have been designated to do something in behalf of the chef in behalf of the giver of food and of drink and of the very breaths that we breathe one day at

a time, one moment at a time. So he said very plainly I am the bread of life. Anyone who is hungry, come and eat. Anyone who is thirsty, come and drink. There is food here enough for us all. If you will come and you will eat and at that moment somehow for some of them there was an understanding. There was a clarity and they said Lord, we will believe. Yes, Jesus we will believe. Give us this food always. That is the promise and where are you going to find it. Literally where are you going to find it here. You can find it possibly in this very room. You can look at the matchless stained glass, the work primarily of one craftsman, and ask yourself is that glass or is it something else. Ask yourself why did he do that. Was it for the money that he got? Did he get well paid. You can look at the cross and the candles and you can ask yourself, what about the man who was paid one hundred and fifty dollars here in Winston-Salem to do that. The man worked for Western Electric and on the side he did a little smithing. Did he get well paid? Was it adequate pay? What is the nourishment and the value of the candlesticks and the cross, of a musical instrument, and of an organist, and of the music that she played, and of the song that is sung, and the scripture that is read, and a prayer that is prayed together, and a pastoral prayer that is offered. Those are sources of food. They are not simply something that we do to pass the time between classes or before lunch. Savor them. Savor this place and come here alone and play piano or organ or sit and listen to what you hear. Listen to your own thoughts before you go to sleep and after you have or have not written in your journal. Listen to what you write and what you read in the letters back home and to friends at other schools. Yes, it can come to you this hope and this promise from the jogging trail or walking through the woods or listening to a concert being played. It can come in the midst of Spanish class or English class or biology. It can come yea verily in calculus as hard as that may be to believe. It can come when we do not expect it to come. It can come in conversation with others. It can come in your own reading of scripture in an effort to understand. It can come, and when it does, then somehow we will understand the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want for anything of value, anything which lasts ultimately is here. The table is set and it is a bountiful table. The breath that we breathe and the food that we eat, the food is imperishable to this extent that it gives us the time and the energy to look and to listen to the Moses' morsel which comes in the person of Jesus Christ.

So after more words in that sixth chapter the writer brings it to a resounding close. Jesus has made it unspeakably clear that there is suffering and there is anguish and there is anxiety associated with this board plan. He has said strange and cannibalistic things if we are literalist. Eat my body and drink my blood. Then he walked away and did not come that way again. He turned to the disciples, now that's to you and me, and said will you also go away. And the person who seemed to feel more than he could think but then would struggle with what he had said and try to do it, that finite, limited, beautiful person Peter said, where are we going to go? You have the words and you are the food of eternal life. END

Chapel Sermon 5/3/84

ED CHRISTMAN: Once upon a time a minister looking at his thermometer in the office before morning worship realized he would never make it through the service fully clad with his robe on. So like some seniors in a couple of weeks, he went only with his robe to the pulpit. His sermon was unusually fascinating at least to himself. He became so enamored of his preaching and came near the edge of the platform, and as he was falling to the floor, he yelled at his congregation, "May no one look at the preacher lest they be struck blind." Everyone covered their eyes, except one little old lady in the rear who said as she peeked through the fingers of one hand, "I think I shall risk one eye." Is not our perception and understanding of conversion to the Christian faith the risking of but one eye? Whether we have grown up in a comfortable evolutionary process of learning what it means to love one's neighbor as one's self or whether we have grown up in a situation in which suddenly there is the dramatic recognition somehow that we are not alone that what lasts and who lasts is God's love for us and we are changed as in an instant. Indeed is it not conceivable whether or not we have evolved or been somehow suddenly snatched from the fiery furnace, we do not practice our religion on a plateau on which it is one-eyed risk in which we remain very much in control.

Not many of us if any in this room ever faced Yahweh as did Moses having to realize that God came to Moses in spite of murder to ask him to be converted, to ask him to chose to be elected. But all of us share with Moses the desire and the need to control so he did not want to turn loose that staff and throw it to the ground that it would become God's rod in his hands when he picked it up. But have not all of us whether we have been cultural Christians or have come unto the Lord to some extent through an evangelical experience have we not all experienced some benchmarks, some times that were different than others when the clock and the sun literally stood still, some moments for good or ill that we recall either with joy or with sorrow as the times and the places that made a real difference. Have you not had something of my experience when twice that I can specifically recall a relationship was threatened because of my dishonesty, and my own sin got in the way. I was desperate because these relationships meant very much to me but no longer were they in my control. They were in the control of the aggrieved person whose trust and rebuilding of a bridge is what I waited upon, and I could not look upon that event with only one eye or one ear. It was a time of sufficient desperation and helplessness that I had to use all the faculties searching the sky and the sounds for any indication of forgiveness and the reestablishment of a relationship. Indeed that was a special time.

Once upon a time there was a young man who lived by his wits and his skill and his strength and by nature's bounty. He was alone except for his brother who was in the boat literally and figuratively with him, and they fished and they yelled and talked and he made his holidays until one day someone said there's a new fishing business in town, follow me. Now how could this man called Simon ever have any idea of what it meant to have his name changed? Could he have known at that moment of following that the rock would turn to the dust of betrayal? Could he possibly know that in the darkness of that betrayal was the very seedbed of someone saying to him feed my sheep and tend my lambs? Would he have followed had he known the up and down of his own impetuousness, his own insight, his own foolishness. Would he have followed had he known that one day in his effort to receive a religious proof and a sign he would step out of a boat and get a second baptism?

Oh I remember baptism do you? In whatever form it came, did you remember that day? I remember the evening. I remember the water closing over me and being lifted up. This past week I saw the person who did that to me, for me on behalf of the Christian faith. There is of course a unique bond between baptizer and baptizee if that experience had the symbolic power of an event in which time stood still. But what did it mean? On that night my mother asked me how do you feel? I said no different. That was a kind of a glib answer. I suppose I was trying to measure it by my temperature or by some immediate sense that I had been changed in such a way that I would know it without question, without fail. How could I have known what that meant about vocation and marriage and life's work and the ups and downs of betrayal and renewal, forgiveness, love, opportunity? How could I know, but somehow with the bond with the one who offered baptism, with the body of persons who had loved me in college and cared for me that was at least the beginning of something more than looking at my life with only one eye open.

The movie of the year, *Tender Mercies*, includes a scene in which driving home from the church in its baptism are a boy and his stepfather, the boy asks, "Well, we got baptized, didn't we?" "Yes, son." "Do you feel any different?" To which the father gave I suspect the answer which I hope the essence of the title of the sermon. He said, "No, not yet." Choosing to be elected means to be open to the possibility that some event like that can have permanent unfolding consequences we know not yet of.

On Saturday I will stand here in this chapel and look at two persons and say, for as much as you have made these vows, exchanged these rings, declared your love and affection each for the other, I pronounce you husband and wife. Can you imagine what it is to try and look at someone and say and mean that as if that is a conversion experienced both eyes opened, both ears opened, without anything but the vaguest glimpse of what they see or hear that means. Well, my might we all ask God to be present as a part of that experience to sustain it, to open it up, to allow it the opportunity for forgiveness

and for renewal and for joy to be a part of such an experience of conversion. Yes, Peter had a marvelous roller coaster experience with Jesus Christ. He passed his spiritual SAT. He was in the top ten percent of his discipleship class. He was there. He plotted. He plunged. He objected. He was renewed. He was not prepared for all the surprises. What do you mean Lord, crucifixion? Don't understand. Not only didn't understand, objected, and then certainly was embarrassed just as he had been with his second baptism, embarrassed, but he didn't leave. Even after betrayal there was something still holding him, some fascination he couldn't quite grasp, something beyond rationality and yet his brain was still alive. There was in other words for the Messiah, for the fisherman, that not birthday of surprise but that death day Friday for which this cross is the most apt representation, a black Friday. Then as if that had been something cruel hoax there was Sunday with all of its whiteness, all of its cleanness, all of its wholeness, all of its completion. There it was. And when prompted by Mary he rushed to the tomb and lo and behold it was empty but he was full. Something had happened. Suddenly there was a birthday and suddenly feeding the sheep became a new possibility. So he had become at least a one and a half eyed Christian. He had dealt with the disputes of the early church. He was in tune. He had been there that day, which perhaps resembled the night that we beat DePaul on the quad, out of control, out of control. There were no criteria in the catalog for that experience, scary. Out of control, Pentecost. Peter was there. He was a part of that. Everything was fine. Everything was in place until another conversion experience, and perhaps his brains had been baked a bit much and he had not had anything to eat and perhaps it was just some kind of strange delusion or need for an ego boost. But suddenly he found himself saying to himself, I can eat any kind of food because God declares whether food is clean or unclean. I don't have to worry about that anymore. I can go eat with a Roman soldier who might persecute us tomorrow. God can deal with the Roman soldier. God can call to be elected such a person named Cornelius. I can go eat with him. Without stopping to find out if anyone else cared or snickered or wondered what he was about. There goes Peter with his eyes opened and his mouth too preaching at the invitation of Cornelius about conversion that happens to all kinds of people at all seasons of their lives.

This past week I talked with a young person who is not in college, who has been to church some but not terribly much. Gradually and then suddenly going to church was the most important thing in this young person's life. It has affected how this person moves about, what they say, what they do before a meal. All kinds of small insignificant ways for this individual has the love of God taken shape in that person's life. It's frightening to the parents. It's frightening and yet liberating and filled with joy for this young person who suddenly believes that God is real and really cares. But most of us would we not prefer to look at such experience askance and say now wait a minute. You're out of control. We all know where this is going. We don't know where those wedding vows would take us. We don't know where that baptism leads.

Let us keep it under some kind of wraps. Let us put the light at least partially under a bushel. Let it shine through just a little at holiday time, and if we think it would matter, let us go to chapel before exams, but don't make a habit of expecting anything to happen there or anywhere else. Don't make a habit of that because you will probably be disappointed. Oh but the man in *Tender Mercies* said I don't know what my baptism means yet. Choosing to be elected, open to that possibility that there will be a moment in this room, on that quad, in one's classroom, laboratory, or walking across the campus or at home that will make a real difference.

A person has been working with her parents all weekend moving them from a house to an apartment. She is weary and she hasn't been fed. She comes home to get her mail and she rifles through it and there's a letter from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill medical school. She deliberately and carefully reads all of the other mail, not those coupons for Burger King. Now this young person has already been rejected twice at three or more medical schools and this is as they say the last (). It's a thin envelope. She opens it and discovers that it's too long to be a rejection letter. You are on the waiting list. Wow. That's incredible. That moment lives. She doesn't know what that means. But she was prepared because she kept trying, because she really wants to go. She is an overachiever and a compulsive individual. Do you recognize that soul? I certainly hope so because that's who most of us are.

So I made a phone call one morning to a man in Raleigh. "Mr. Cannon," and I gave him my name and I said, "Did I pass or fail the bar exam?" There is a moment of unspeakable silence between Winston-Salem and Raleigh, North Carolina. "Yes, you passed." What am I going to do with that information? Sitting in that office. What am I going to do? I'm looking for a quad experience then. I want to celebrate. I've been waiting a long time for that. What about your baptism? I don't know. Wait and see but Frederick Buechner suggests that the images we tend to use about conversion might be reversed. We speak of conversion being the movement from sin and darkness and despair and alienation and the things spoken of in the call to prayer and prayer itself to forgiveness and light and hope and fullness, a healed condition. So be it. But suppose conversion is moving for the light to that control that we do have and that we cherish so. Those idols of opportunity which keep us within the light of our headlight beams, within the control of parents and teachers and peers but in control of institutional church. Suppose there is some sense in which conversion is moving from that partial light to the total darkness of a leap of faith in which you turn loose the rope. You do not deny parents or church. You do not deny professor or peer. But you do deny the possibility that completion of life is based upon a one-eyed risking religion. You turn loose and certainly in the dark that hungering dark that invites you and me, you better have both ears and both eyes opened and your hands better be out there feeling your way because you have no earthly or heavenly idea where you are going. Is that not an

appropriate image for conversion? It's a leap of faith into the dark and curiously in the dark comes a voice or a touch or a something that moves us in the direction of conversion and a freedom and a sense of joy and hope and life we had not known before. Is that not possible?

In desperation one writes to another person who is dependent chemically upon drugs and says you are a good person. That was desperation, wasn't anything else to say. All the arguments have been laid out. Then the response to that desperate invitation to election is that the individual says I am going to change. Now I don't know whether or not that story has a happy ending. But I know that somehow plunging into the darkness may be the only way to find the light. But why is it that in terms of personal morality a teenager who finds God and why is it that standing here in this place persons can make that commitment for as much as I make this promise until death us do part. Why is it that in baptism we assume in the life of the church discipleship can mean some kind of permanent direction, some change that we share? But when it comes to matters of politics, we become rational and smug and sure that principalities in power, that the power of evil is such that we cannot do anything like apply this metaphor of light to darkness or darkness to light. We cannot talk about conversion.

For my vantage point with whatever eyes I have to see and ears to hear, the arms race is terribly frightening, but more than frightening it is boring, boring in those terms there is no difference between what we say and they say. None at all. It maybe the only course we can follow. Rationality and prudence say unilateral disarmament is absurd and I would agree. I would also agree that I have not the power to impose the will of a quasi-pacifist or whatever it is that I am upon the nation state. But as a Christian am I free to say there is no connection between what changes the heart of a person and the effect of that change upon their political obligation.

EC: Congressman, or a group of congressmen do not () invite the president to their place. Go to his place if he asks. Is that so? I think that's one-eyed religion. I felt very uncomfortable saying that. I felt very uncomfortable saying that I want you to have a revival in Washington, felt very uncomfortable saying such a thing as that. But let it stand. In all candor Mr. Neal's position on EMX has changed somewhat and I say thank God for that. I say that universities need not be so predetermined to believe that excellence and religion have to be separate as that we cannot chart our own course, a course in which religion is the very vehicle by which liberal arts achieves its ultimate goals. Yes, one must move from the light of what one knows into the darkness of what one does not know in order to learn. Dependency upon the past, dependency upon one's peers and one's teachers. Dependency upon one's discipline study should and ought to lead to the ultimate questions who and what lasts. And you're willing to try to make some connection between that stuff. You cannot fall in love with calculus. You fall in love with persons and you become interested in calculus, and can you discern the difference

between the two. Can you find a way to say to the university there are some ways and means by which we can be a far better school if we take religion more seriously in the very leaven of this place and be unique in a very special way. I'm not quite sure what I am saying by the grace of God I need not know. Peter went and ate with Cornelius and that was some strange kettle of fish. It was a different kind of food that might nourish us forever. Of late I have had the experience of joy and despair. I have been up and down. I have been seeking to open the other eye. How about you? END

Chapel Sermon 11/15/84

ED CHRISTMAN: The cotton patch gospel angel looked at the disciples and with majestic gestures suggested, get on with it, and pointed that they should follow. There was no blueprint in that marvelous, raucous poignant musical, and the gospel of John doesn't give us the prescription and the blueprint either. It only gives us the invitation and the command. It is the board plan of Jesus part two. Jesus is found with the disciples bending over a fish fire inviting them to put part of their new catch on the coals. He gives them something to eat and the message seems simple and clear and awesome enough. I am the Lord whom you have professed to be the Son of God. I have nourished you as the vine nourishes the branches. I have been the door, which has been opened inviting you to new life. I have been the bread, which gives you the nourishment. I have been the liquid, which gives you the sustenance, and you need no other. Now I invite you to come to breakfast and eat again. For indeed good disciples if I have fed you, then you go feed them. If I have been the shepherd and you have been the sheep, now you are the shepherds and they are the sheep. That seems clear and simple enough does it not.

But the gospel of John is not quite that simple. It invites us to a kind of sight that is based upon blindness because you see when the angel of cotton patch and when Jesus tells disciples to go to them, to tend the lambs, to feed the sheep, to be the shepherd, to be the host. That's all he says as if that were not enough. There is a blindness here. Lord I don't see. In the scripture, which I did use two weeks ago, Lord how is it that we would do the works of God and Jesus' response was understand that I am the bread of life and you can do the works of God. If you accept that I am who I say that I am and if you accept what you said to the woman, to the Samaritan woman at the well, then you'll know that you have been nourished in such a way that you don't need the plastic card anymore.

Of course we have to have the plastic card. We enter into a board plan with Wake Forest University that is a parity relationship, and therefore if the food is not any good, the consumer can complain. If the food is satisfactory and you keep the card, there is an ongoing account. There is a clear understanding of the relationship, no questions asked. But Jesus harkening back to the Old Testament and the () and the experience of the fathers to whom he spoke, identified the

wilderness experience as a wilderness plan different from Slater. For in the wilderness they paid nothing, and they got exactly what God wanted them to have, and they grumbled and complained because it was the same, but there was no fast food store. There was no place else to go. It was the only plan in town, which was a way of suggesting that they were dependent upon whatever air gave them to breathe, whatever time God gave them in which to love one another, whatever place God gave them if it were a God forsaken wilderness and it were the manna which has been described in many somewhat in uncomplimentary terms, if that's all the food there is to eat, so let it be. Dependent, grumbling, fragile, fearful creatures that we are, do we ever expect to have a parity relationship with God? Jesus said I would not suggest that as an adequate plan. I suggest that you understand that there is a connection between the wilderness plan and Moses being the instrument by which you come to know your dependency and yet at the same time the basis upon which you are free to walk and not be weary, to run and not be tired but most importantly of all to see that which you cannot see and not be afraid that there is no prescriptive plan. That I have not said to you to whom you are to go and what do you say when you get there. How do you spend your time and your energy.

Jesus dealt primarily with this one delightful disciple who was called and had to be recalled, this disciple who was impulsive and direct and assertive. This disciple who was called Rock and who became dust and became Rock again. This disciple whom the scripture here foretells will go, get on with it and will be martyred for his having followed the pathway, but Jesus does not have to tell him that. He says tend my sheep, feed my lambs. Follow the nourishment though has been giving. Come Peter you seem to be somewhat uncertain. Eat some more of this flounder and understand what it really is. For Peter you can be blind if I am giving you sight. You don't have to have the chaplain to give you a list of the things you can do with your time and energy. Oh as I was preparing the sermon you should have seen the list. But in my finitude I began to discover the list is incomplete. Of course you know by looking around you at persons here and you know of conditions that need to be spoken to. But John's gospel stays away from the list in order to say what it is you are to see, what you are to see is that you do not need to see a list for the fundamental specific and individual thing you have to do is to follow Jesus. Unless you're prepared to do that, what good is the list. Then we're back to the board plan with Slater. Let's see if I can measure and balance it all out. Do I have enough time to do this? Do I have enough energy to address that concern? How do I order things with Slater it's very easy because you know exactly where you stand. How much money is left in relation to the semester's length. Jesus said no, that will not work. I am calling upon you to be shepherds. I have a different approach and the shepherd, as he has told us in the tenth chapter, may be the person who lays down his life for a friend, may be the one for whom the recovery of hundredth sheep is more glorious than the maintaining of the ninety-nine.

Peter may have heard of the story of David when Saul said how is it that you're going out here to face Goliath. He said, well, when I was a shepherd, I have rescued lambs from the very jaws of bears and lions. I was not afraid. Now that was my task. I was shepherd of the sheep and it didn't matter what might have happened. I would go and rescue the sheep one at a time. I was the shepherd. I wonder if it is imaginable to you and me that we are going to lay down our lives for our faith in Jesus Christ. It might be that laying down our treasures, laying down our goals and objectives and our assurances of who and what we ought to be and what we ought to do is as great a gift and is as great a risk as laying down one's life for the Lord.

You all, most of you except a few faces that I see who are old enough to remember a phenomenon called radio, have grown up in a period in which the attention span is supposed to be seven minutes and I'm not sure that's accurate. I grew up with radio where imagination was the ingredient, and on Sunday nights we didn't always go to church. We went to listen to () McGee and Molly and Edward Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Fred Allen and Jack Benny. I said we went. That is we sat down in a chair and listened. Jack Benny as some of you may know was notorious for his carefulness with his money. He took stewardship to the absurd degree. So that if he needed money, it took five minutes to unlock all the safes and get all the fire alarms disconnected. In this particular episode, Jack Benny was walking down a street, and he is stopped by a person who says to him as he puts a gun in his ribs, I suppose, your money or your life. Radio waves are filled with silence. Nothing. Nothing. For what seems like an interminable period of time and finally the robber says, well, I'm waiting. Jack Benny says, I'm thinking. I'm thinking. For Jack Benny the choice between his money and his life, that was a choice. He couldn't make a distinction. Jesus says can you make a distinction between all the things that you have planned to do this day and in college and with your life. The commandment I give to you my shepherds of the sheep, tend those lambs, feed the sheep. Can you do that? Must you live by the plastic money and its meaning of an accountable list of things of how life is to be measured. Is that the measure? Have you had any wilderness experience of being dependent upon something else or upon God? Have you sensed your incompleteness? Have you known what it was to be desperate and grateful for whatever food or drink you could have delivered unto you? Well, then in that case pay attention he said and pay attention one at a time. For me it is very important to talk about the body of Christ and the sense of our connectedness and the sense of how in our dependency and our limitation we gain some reassurance because there are others in a similar condition. When we sing the hymns, we can hear other voices singing and we can know there are others in the struggle. We can see that there are at the time of Pentecost after Easter, we can see and feel the presence of others. When Peter decided to go fishing, there were others who were prepared to go. But when Jesus talked to Peter at breakfast, he was talking to this one person, and before there could be any collection of persons, before there could be any body, there does have to be the parts. There does have to be the

individual looking at the door that is open, sensing the connection with the vine which gives the food and understanding who the shepherd is who is asking you and me individually to tend the sheep. Peter so frail, so weak, so strong, hears the message. His feelings are hurt. [abrupt ending of recording] END

Chapel Sermon 12/13/84

ED CHRISTMAN: Sitting on a quad bench on a crisp fall day was I concerned about the rays of sun sapping up the last of my moisture in my emaciated body. Did I have any apprehension as I began talking with the television reporter that there was not enough nourishment to the brain cells so that I could fashion a thought about a fast. I know it never occurred to me that I could not put the sentences together, nor that my tongue was so swollen that I would not be able to speak the words once the ideas had been formed. I choose to fast. It is not a necessity. I choose to discuss the needs of the world and how we raise money, and we hope to raise the conscience level, and we hope that some persons in this room become the bearers of the word, which was read to you. You have been given all things the scripture says. You have been given food to eat. But somehow we cannot manage to distribute it to the persons whose life is threatened by the sun's rays being too bright and whose brains do atrophy and whose tongues are swollen. I choose to fast but not to look at pictures of those who do not and have no choice but fasting. I really don't want to see any more crying children wandering about as rabble of the earth. I really don't want to ponder what it means for persons your age and mine with all of this cunning and skills we have for survivor and all the body fat we have that we too would die if we were in other parts of the world by the grace of God. That just means the problem is truly unsolvable.

You see you must understand how complex it is. Did God really create us male and female all of us? Did God say be fruitful and multiply? Oh dear Lord what does that mean though. Did the Lord God say to you and me we'll subdue the earth and have dominion and power over everything including the distribution of food. Surely, and where is it we find the image of God? Do we find it in those persons or do we not whose pictures I do not want to see. Can I not somehow disconnect myself from them and those hollow eyes, those distended bellies? How could they in any sense be the bearers of God's image. What contribution do they make but to pain? What contribution do they make but extending at least for a day or so or for a period of time my sense of guilt? Aren't they backing down the evolutionary chain and somewhere in that process of backing down shedding the image of God. Surely I'm not connected with those people. But alas the scripture says male and female, black and white and brown and yellow, poor and rich. Blessed are the poor and the unpoor. Oh yes, I think it would be better to consider to objecting to God's generous gift of image. For somehow that image suggests responsibility, and it

suggests that we are free to hope, hope that this unsolvable complex issue can be solved somehow or that we are obligated to address it even if it cannot be solved.

We have no choice. Oh but couldn't we choose chaplain to be something else? Why don't we just let the sociologists and the biologists and the psychologists and the anthropologists all link us all together as creatures. Why not let the gene pools be merged somehow and the distinctions be blurred between those creatures and us creature. Wouldn't it be rather better to be a beaver? Wouldn't it be better to be something else and enjoy the fantasies of reincarnation, what we have been or what we might become? Haven't you wanted to be a bird or be an animal. We get asked that on tests all the time. What would you like to be? The bible says the stamp of God has been placed upon you and you cannot be a beaver or even a baboon.

Visiting Rock Creek Zoo in Washington I began imitating a baboon. I did such a wonderful job of imitation the baboon was about to lose his or her mind. I thought as the baboon grasped the bars in that cage it was not to get out to give me a high five and say you have really captured me brother. I sort of thought he had or she had something else in mind. Thank God the bars were strong, and I got over my need to be a fool and establish some kind of temporary linkage with a baboon. Oh I do want to explain for the benefit for those of us who never studied evolution that I have found the missing link. I have found that which establishes the difference between baboons and human beings, between human beings and God. Yes, that missing link has been discovered. Perhaps in the course of the sermon you will understand who and what that missing link is.

I enjoy watching channel four's many educational programs including Jacques Cousteau. Jacques Cousteau, one of God's creature upon whom the image has been placed has a marvelous sense of imagination and connection and empathizes with all kinds of creatures especially those under the sea. Jacques Cousteau loves whales and porpoises and don't we all enjoy their antics and see ourselves somehow connected? Well, brother Cousteau, I will dare not say the pun that has to do with your love of creatures that grow and live and move in the great depths of the water. Jacques Cousteau you are all wet according to the bible, not according to a lot of theories and understandings of the linkage. You're all wet, Doc. It isn't like that. There is a connection between creatures, but somehow or other those who wrote Genesis concluded by their observation whether they were in Rock Creek Park or not that human beings hope for the resolution of the problem of world hunger and baboons don't even know it exists.

So we are created in God's image, but we would rather not have that connection brought before us too explicitly. I remember some years ago a man stood in this pulpit with a rather gaunt face. He really was not a very attractive person and

his message was less attractive. LB Johnson chose for his text that unmentionable passage in Luke about a poor man named Lazarus whose sores were licked and got a few crumbs from the table of a rich man and just hung around the gate and didn't have enough to eat. He died; rich man died. Then the negotiations begin between Hades and Heaven, and it seems that the inability of the rich man to make a connection with Lazarus while they were both living meant strangely enough that the connection could not now be made in death. Forsaking his own eternity the rich man says but Lord wouldn't you even speak a word, give a clue to my brothers who are still alive lest they miss the boat as well. Oh nothing, no unrelenting. The passage simply is stark. It's like a black cross. It's unrelenting. There's no place to hide. There's no redaction. There's no de-mythologizing. It's just there. There were no doctrines at stake. The scripture says feed the hungry, and we would rather somehow do or be something else wouldn't we. We have our images. We have our portraits of what it means to gather in God's name. We have our representations, our images, which become idols sometimes but need not.

There is a person at Wake Forest who in recent travels abroad and study discovered a statue, and the statue was of a famous person and that person's name is one of his names. So he had his picture made on the statue. That's a good idea especially if this human being can make a connection with the statue or a piece of metal and understand the only way that Columbus could have any meaning for this young man is if he too took some of the same risks and decided they were solvable problems and that he'd been given a great gift of life and of education and of service opportunity and ought to do something about it.

So we gather in worship as children, "Jesus loves me, this I know for the bible tells me so." God loves all little children. How is that child's ritual repetition to have any meaning? What are you to do with it now that you are not a child? Well, it's possible simply to forget it or to let it be a frozen ritual that has no meaning whatsoever or the image of God can come alive for you and me. We are free to hope and those persons who cannot do that because they are starving to death are our brothers and sisters. We are connected to them and we are to hope no matter how difficult it is to hope.

Now we would of course like to remember how some people misplace the importance of hunger and we pick on good on Esau. Good old Esau was hungry. He had been out hunting. He came home and there was his wonderful brother fixing up a pot of stew. Give me some of the stew, brother. Oh of course I'll give it to you on just one small condition. All I want is your birthright. All I want is your soul. Esau says what good is a person's birthright if he's dead.

One of the leaders of Bread for the World in talking about a recent visit to a country in East Africa said after these villagers had been given some food and some clothes to wear they began to dance and sing. He had to ask an interpreter what are they saying. The answer was they are saying we have food to eat and clothes to wear. We have everything. Esau

survived long enough to forgive his brother, not a bad theological way for things to turn out. Yes, this very day there is a ritual. It's Oxfam. It's all over the world. We can pool our money and our thoughts and our prayers and our energies as a statement of hope. It can mean nothing to have fasted for a day. It can be simply a nutritional healthy act that ought to occur more often or it could be far more than that, couldn't it? Consider this is the third year. This was begun because of a person who is well educated, but somewhere in his life and in his reading of the scriptures he found that the bible is so irrational and so simplistic. He just reminded us, David Foushee did, that the bible says feed the hungry, no redaction, no de-mythologizing. It just says feed the hungry. President Hearn dips his oar in the water and says this is what we ought to do and the editor of *the Old Gold and Black* does what other editors have never done and that's speak on behalf of something that's not all that popular or well known. Chuck Hess says we'll throw in some money ourselves. A lot of students helped from the TV and radio networks want to get into the act somehow, feeling some connection perhaps, some need. Oxfam fast, we'll get some and some conscience-raising. Suppose it became a tradition that the Thursday before Thanksgiving was the end of an entire week of focus upon the matters that Bread for the World and Oxfam deal with all the time.

Suppose we garnered together those persons like Ray Kuhn and we were inspired by this person. Some of you have become involved in Dr. Kuhn's efforts to raise money. You see my brothers and sisters, this man is devoting a portion of his life to the eradication of a parasitic disease that has already killed forty million people. They made some modest breakthroughs, but he would like to see us as a university much more involved in that. He has a vision. The image of God is alive in this man. Ginny Britt is down there trying to minister the Band-Aids of help for the poor and the needy and some of you and others have done that too. She has skills and there are others like her. Gary Gundersun and other alums has tried to plant the seeds in Seeds magazine, not just to find sacks of grain but the ways and means by which we would address this problem long term. Why don't we gather these kinds of folks together? Why don't we address the problem educationally? Why don't we assume there is somebody here who can make a difference? Gary Gunderson used to sit here. Ginny Britt has been here, but why can't we take our rituals of worship and the gift of the mind and the spirit, which God has given us and let it make a difference. God placed the image of himself upon us. That may mean many things, but for this morning's sermon it means that God gave us the freedom and the hope that reconciliation can occur between persons in ways that we've never dreamed of it before. God's investment in us however despicable we may be, however prone to violence, however prone to greed we are, however fear laden we are, God's investment in us is permanent, irreversible. It is as if you can accept this analogy and this image it is as if God has married us each and every one for better, for worse and for richer, for poorer, in

sickness and in health, until death us do part and God has even spoken to that. A permanent commitment in Jesus Christ, that's the linkage. That's the missing link between all these creatures and all this food and us and God. That's the link.

Well, you see one day they came to the Lord and they said Lord we have these coins here. They have the image of Caesar upon them. What about these coins Lord? You're an awfully bright teacher. The Lord said well, whose picture is on the coin? Whose image is there? Well, it's Caesar's. The Lord said well, then give Caesar the money. You have been stamped by God, render yourself unto the Lord. That's awesome joy, the joy of knowing that there is hope in the world in the face of despair and hunger and death, the joy that God has given us a connection that is permanent, that provides the brightness and the light and the hope for each of us. The rich that we need to follow the example of the man who walked past Lazarus as if he were an animal. But in awesome joy freely rendering unto God godness. Amen. END

Chapel Sermon 8/29/85 (part)

ED CHRISTMAN: This is the season of looking and listening, and for that reason as we worship this morning, I want you to look (). No doubt you have seen it before. But the advent banner, which is one of the ones that Mrs. Anne Kessler Shields designed for us, is the least seen among you because you are here and we are here such a short period. Indeed advent itself is a very short period; and therefore, looking and listening is terribly important. I invite you to look upon what you see. What you see is not only a banner expressive of the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but that incarnation includes both light and it includes this cross. The cross and the two candlesticks were crafted by a local Western Electric employee who smithed on the side. At one point shortly after we got these advent and other banners, I agonized over whether or not it was aesthetically appropriate to put this cross in front of any one of these banners. Then I realized I can do nothing else but put them in front of any banner in order that the entire story is told. The only time of the year when that seems a bit heavy-handed is during lent when the banner itself is a majestic cross symbolizing Christ's sacrifice. But look upon the whole scene and ask yourself what does it mean. One advent season I had uncovered from someplace, now lost I regret, a portrait of Joseph and the baby Jesus. That's the only time I had ever heard his name in any sense identified with a work of art at this season of the year, other than W.H. Alden's Christmas oratorio which has a very poignant words on behalf of the faith of one Joseph. I used that portrait, but I also had arranged it so—this is before we had our cross—. In order to have it pictured up here we had put some books underneath the picture, and it cast a shadow upon the picture. Indeed that's as it ought to be. Advent is the season of expectation. It is the expectation that our sins of lukewarmness and of indifference and of out and out disobedience to God will be forgiven. It is a

season of penance. It is the season of expectation and that ultimate expectation is that darkness and light will somehow come together, and we will vote for with our lives the light.

Let us pray. Oh mighty God this is the season of darkness and light, of joy and hope and celebration, of love being spent in behalf of others. We somehow know our Father that that is because of thy love for us expressed mostly completely in Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus' very coming to this earth and in his life, death and resurrection that we know of darkness and that we know that we love darkness more than light. The darkness is sometimes not of our own making. It is sickness and illness and death, sometimes quite suddenly of those whom we love. For death is no respecter of this or any season. Then almighty God may this () and light and this star of this season punctuate or lives and our dealing with life and death in all seasons. Make us mindful oh God of this time of the year for ourselves and those around us and the unique privilege of studying together of living together and of being of one mind and spirit during this exam season. Let us not feel overly guilty for what have been given us as gifts. Let us ponder, oh God, what thy message is to us as to how we share our thanksgiving of having given what we did not deserve. Forgive us when we treat lightly this season because of its rushed pace. Let us not overlook the glance and the look we give to another. Let us fill each unforgiving minute with love and affection as we have opportunity. Let us not minimize the value of our kind words and our clever phrases and our oft-repeated clichés. Give them oh God we pray a sense of purpose and meaning. For we follow the one star. We are bound together in the looking and the listening for the words and the music which will kindle in our hearts the sense of thy coming in Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen. END.

Chapel Sermon 1/16/86

ED CHRISTMAN: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life. The life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Steve Sachs is headed toward third base. He is a very happy young man because he had just hit a game-winning home run. His excitement is translated into an action, a sign. As he rounds third base he gives the Los Angeles Dodgers coach a low five and proceeds to home plate only to discover later that he has broken the coach's thumb. Our symbols, our signs, our enthusiasm, our desire to let things make a statement for ourselves may get beyond their intended level of enthusiasm. Our flags wave, both Confederate and American on this campus. That is a source of both joy and pain and

sorrow. For do we not all recognize the validity of symbols of patriotism and remembrance and of hope and expectation. A mixed blessing our symbols of flags.

In standing in the harbor of New York City surrounded by scaffolding is the lady, the lady cast in green, now being refurbished at the cost of millions of dollars. Why do we do that? If it is not because there is some value we cannot put in words but we're willing to put into money about this statue given to us by France over a hundred years ago. Those who have been to Venice have seen the matchless, painful, patient work upon the architecture of that city. How we seek to restore and recapture and keep and hope for the future in such wonderful works of art.

A student wrote me from Germany this summer saying I have visited a cathedral which has been in process of being built for hundreds of years, and I realized they will still be building it after I have died. There's something strange and powerful and uplifting about our daring, audacious desire to reach beyond our capacity and our understanding of ourselves and our limited frail being. I visited some fifty years ago the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City and that matchless rose window is there to stay in my memory. It had been in the process of being built. It is still being built on Amsterdam Avenue. The pyramids, not in Egypt but in Mexico, are there as a testimony to what a certain civilization wanted to say about sun and moon and gods and heaven and earth and they're there as testimonies, as symbols. Indeed some of those North and South American Indians of the past had as their symbol something that has come to have a quite different meaning. It was the swastika, and for them it had a positive, civilizing influence and yet it has now become the most demonic symbol perhaps in all of western if not of all history. And yet we are prone to say and we must say thank God for symbols and the possibility to fashion them and to use them and to be inspired by them even if they are in some instances as poor, as destructive and as evident of our sinfulness as is that swastika.

Jeremiah speaks to us, this sorrowful prophet who knew of darkness and of evil and of estrangement from God. In the passage, which Tim read, he describes God's action in words that themselves are a symbol. For God has now found in Jeremiah's words another way to say you are created in my image. I mean by that you will have me written on your hearts. God forsakes the earlier covenant and writes a new one. He writes it to a group and he writes it to every single solitary individual, every person is created in the image of God. No matter how despicable; no matter how disinterested; no matter how passive; no matter how oblivious to the symbols here even in this room and the many symbols we encounter every day designed to uplift us and call us to excellence. No matter. God writes upon our hearts. In the writing he makes one clear unmistakable declaration. I will remember your sins of despicableness and disinterest no more. I will remember you by virtue of your name, image of God, and each of you has a name.

I have tried to make that very clear over the years. Lo and behold as is always the case, there are complaints. You didn't use my name. You see I didn't see much food in the freshman class. I had to discover on Sunday afternoon that I had left out a piece of fudge. I found out that I had left out two sets of sheets, which probably were bought, yes, at Sears. Yes, that's a freshman in the class named Sears. I overlooked the fact that there are eleven persons named Brown and each is an individual and many of them have now learned to claim their middle initial. The name is a bond. It is something of value. It is something that gives us courage and is to be worn with pride.

On next Tuesday we try to emphasize the importance of your name and your bond and who you are and why you're in this place. We gather in a convocation. We invest the honor council and the judicial board with their authority, which certainly can be no less than their own honor and their own sense of fairness and justice. We introduce the new faculty as a pledge to them and to ourselves that you and oh we will teach and learn the best that we can. We have robes and we have a mace. A mace so beautifully fashioned of spun gold as to inspire us but if one were to drop it, it shatters like glass. What a magnificent symbol of the importance of the centrality of the yet fragile nature of liberal arts and of learning. Symbols among symbols. Music and words, tradition and freedom, songs and words designed to inspire and to uplift us together. Yes, it is going back in order to go into the future. That's what a convocation seeks to do so that somehow the present can be moved from a kind of passive sense of well we're here and it's okay and a sense or a tendency toward cynicism and despair that the world and I am not necessarily going any place. I'm confused and I'm uncertain, and besides what difference does it make anyway. Convocation is a symbol, which is a collection of symbols designed to change that, and to say it does matter and that when you look at those robes you look at the persons who bear those robes and if they bear them well, then you and I are the better for it. You look at your peers and you say we are governed in part by ourselves as a badge of honor, as a badge of maturity, as a badge of affirmation that we are created in God's image to be trusted with the most sacred gift in an academic community with[out?] which we cannot survive. The only nourishment we must have and that is honor, honor among us kind of people.

In that chapel later in the year we will do something else which is symbolic. We will light individual candles, one at a time, 2400 and we will hold them high and say, "Joy to the world the Lord is come." For unto us a child is born. We do that in the midst of the natural darkness that surrounds us. We do that in the midst of the spiritual darkness around and within us. We do that in spite of that and because of it. We say thank God for symbols because they do connect us with the Almighty, and they do make it possible for us once more to believe that life is worth living in excellence and in joy and in relationship to other persons.

So we gather in this room, and we look upon a symbol, a banner designed initially for weddings, a symbolic event in which rings and words are exchanged in the hope that something meaningful will have occurred there that will last. A drawing and a capturing of us away from our limitations to a strength and a love that we do not even know yet into a mystery, into the Christos right in the center. Why not use that banner for other occasions as well? Why not fastened one's eyes upon what that means and whether or not we mean by what we say when we are in Christ, linked together as half moons or circles, whatever imagination tells you of that symbol, let it speak to you and to me. Let this carved lamb on the front of this altar say something to you and to me. Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. The servant lamb, the suffering servant who without fear broke the chains of sin and death once and for all so that that cross appropriately smithed in black tells us the entire story. It is not only aesthetically appropriate for this room to have had the cross done in black. It is a matchless symbol of the totality of what it means to talk about violence and death. But the cross is empty brothers and sisters because Jesus is not there. He has risen.

This chapel stays open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. What does that mean? It means that the symbols here or just the room itself is a place where you and I can find solace and can find hope and can find release. This is a place for you and me. It is a place that is open and invites us by its very nature to worship God almighty. It need not happen here. As some of us know from having heard the provost at the Pre-school conference, that kind of experience of linking with a symbol of enormous power can happen near Burlington at a service station sitting in the front seat of your car drinking a Coca-Cola and remembering Wordsworth's lines and having a burden of despair lifted as if he said he had been lifted right out of the chair in the automobile. It can happen. If you have eyes to see and ears to hear and if you believe that in fact God has written upon your heart and mind, then we can say thank God for symbols.

A week from this coming Monday the faculty will have on its agenda a resolution. The resolution will ask the trustees of the university to divest themselves of all substantial financial connections of investment with South Africa. Once colleague said to me well, we really need to know don't we whether we have any such investments before we consider the resolution. I sort of agreed at the moment, but as I reflected on it, the answer is no. That's not what we are dealing with in a symbolic act. It is really irrelevant whether we do. Symbols do not ask the question well how is this going to look. We're not even going to talk about tongues of fire. Am I going to ask first whether or not they are aesthetically attractive or will they move people to action. Did anyone say well, we need a cross as our central symbol? Do we need a basket of summer fruit or do we need a crust of bread and a cup of wine? Symbols of value and meaning do not ask the question first well, whether or not is it relevant to our present condition. We don't need to know whether we have any investments there. We need to

know whether or not we want to make a symbolic act about something that we grievously know firsthand perhaps not to that extent but can we not know that Apartheid in any shape and form is wrong? Have we not participated in enough racism ourselves to not want to purge ourselves one more time of that vicious and violent form of sin? Oh but Chaplain, it won't do any good. First, we will say perhaps ah the trustees will ignore it. We do not pass resolutions on the basis of whether or not someone else is going to like them or approve of them. We pass them because we believe they are right. It won't do any good because it will just mean more blacks out of work. Well, rather shortsighted view of a long-standing problem. What do you mean they're out of work. They're out of freedom. They have been lead to the belief that being black means you are bad and inferior and wrong. Having a job, you've got to be kidding me.

Bishop Tutu said, "I first thought about becoming a minister," and now he is an Anglican priest, Anglican bishop. "I first began thinking about that when as a child I saw a white minister doff his hat to my mother," an empty gesture for sure. An act of civility. Perhaps the white minister forgot himself. Who cares? It was an act that stood upon its own two feet and it had substance and power. Now I have fixed my name to those who will propose this resolution because I believe it's right. I would hope that it would make a difference. I would hope first that the faculty would vote for it. I would hope secondly that the trustees would heed it. But I am not dependent upon either in order to say that somehow it is right to do it. However, audacious and hypocritical it may seem in the eyes of many or some.

Twenty-five years ago this same faculty heard a professor of religion from South Carolina say that slavery was wrong. That faculty was so audacious to say to persons whom it had no connection at all except in indirectly, merchants of Winston-Salem, desegregate your lunch counters. How audacious. How many times in the history of this faculty has it dared pass such a resolution? Only once because such symbolic gestures do not occur every second Monday of the month in the academic year. But when they do, let them be what they are.

What symbols inform your life and mine? What symbolic gestures, what words, what music, acts, what feelings, what hugs and what handshakes inform us and tell us who we are. What concrete expression do we give to John's (). In the beginning and that beginning was the source of creation and the source of life and the source of light. What are the acts that bind us together in God's image? What are the evidence that God has written upon our hearts? At registration everybody signs their name to something. They make a commitment to their classes and the teachers and the chaplains at the university make a commitment to make that learning experience one of growth and power. Opportunities for worship are provided here and elsewhere to enrich and direct that sense of commitment. Well, everybody then is committed to something. Many of you last Friday night and many others signed a card indicating interest in religious activities or a

volunteer service corps. Others picked up fliers about the volunteer service corps on Tuesday. What does that mean? It means as much enfleshment as you give it. Whether as an excellent student who does nothing else. Whether as a student who studies and learns and who does other things. How do those things you do relate to the values that you are committed to? What are your symbols? What informs your life? What gives it power? What gives it hope? For the Lord God has written upon your heart and mind. He remembers not our sins anymore. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. Thank God for symbols. END

Chapel Sermon 2/20/86

ED CHRISTMAN: And the people all said Amen. There was a Jewish leader named Nicodemus who belonged to the party the Pharisees. One night he went to Jesus and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him." Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." How can a grown man be born again Nicodemus asked? He certainly cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time. "I am telling you the truth," replied Jesus, "that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit. A person is born physically of human parents, but he is born spiritually of the spirit. Do not be surprised because I tell you that you must all be born again. The wind blows wherever it wishes. You hear the sound it makes. You do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the spirit." "How can this be?," asked Nicodemus. Jesus answered, "You are a great teacher in Israel and you don't know this. I am telling you the truth. We speak of what we know and we report what we have seen yet none of you is willing to accept our message. Do you not believe me when I tell you about the things of the world. How will you ever believe then when I tell you about the things of heaven. No one has ever gone up to heaven except the son of man who came down from heaven. Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert. In the same way the son of man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Forty-eight dollars and sixty-three cents is what I paid for the books for one course. The highest figure I heard this semester, two-fifty. The most interesting story I heard about buying books was a man who had two hundred and one dollars. The bill was two hundred and two, fifteen. The woman waiting on him borrowed the dollar and fifteen cents from her boss and invited the young man to supper. What are we going to get from those sacks of gold? What secrets are hidden therein. What manifestations of learning might emerge and blossom forth in the beautiful springtime? How many stars in the heavens might we find if we are diligent students of that much opportunity? Epiphany may not be easy to spell, and for some

it's not easy to understand, but if one wants to know one asks an Episcopalian who simply says it's the manifestation of coming of Jesus Christ and it can include a lot of things. But it is the presence of Jesus Christ, the breaking forth somehow into our presence of a star or a secret that is no longer a secret. A birth unlike other births. An event like other events that drives the tyrannical king to massacre and drives a group of enslaved people to their last desperate hope. That's this birth. Strange and still shrouded in some mystery.

Some months ago a young woman was sitting with friends having food and drink at Penelope's. It was not her occasion to be there at that time of the day. She got up from her seat and she walked to the bar where sat a young man. "Hello," she said. He responded with a smile. "Would you like to talk?" Last Monday they were talking about that in my office because they love each other and they're planning to get married. He doesn't usually go to Penelope's. He was in there while his clothes were getting washed. They haven't been back to Penelope's but two or three times, and it has not acquired some kind of theopanic sacredness. But when you ask them about what has taken place since that time and on that day, they talk about mystery and wonder and uncomfortableness and strength and power and weakness and attraction and spirituality. I did not put that word in their vocabulary. I was glad to hear it. That was their interpretation of two persons, one of whom I know well enough to say that her life had come apart, and they found each other. They were born again. Nicodemus would say, but I want to see their psychological profile. They would say sure. We don't care. Find out how opposite or alike we are. It matters not. Nicodemus would have to shake his head.

He would also shake his head if he heard about a person who graduated from this school when he was here liked to play the piano while he was studying classics. Sometimes late at night in this building playing piano he would be really wrapped up in the music and there would be a sense of a strange presence right here. So strange and set so real he would never turn around to see if Chopin was really standing there. Nicodemus would say counseling center. (). I don't care Nicodemus would say that you graduated from an Ivy League school with a Ph.D. I don't care that you have an earned degree in law. Something wrong with you. Strange.

Two people who used to sit in this chapel. Also lived in the inner city of Winston-Salem when that was not the chic thing to do. They later married. He was into computers and conscientious objecting. She went to seminary, and they were born again and again. She's a Presbyterian minister in Virginia, and he came along for the ride and found himself another computer job. Born again. A young man who frequented this chapel last year wandered off to Washington, got involved with some unspeakable kinds of people called refugees, and he really couldn't hack that. His wife could pretty well but he could not. He's gotten a job with *Sojourners Magazine*. Nicodemus would say, not him. You've got to be kidding. He really wasn't

all that good of a student. He was kind of strange. He did a presentation that was supposed to be Christ in our world, and he didn't get up and give a speech. He didn't even write a poem. He did a collage of stuff. That was his thing. Nicodemus would say, I don't really understand.

Now in this one-night seminar with the Nazarene, Nicodemus was apparently not as well prepared as he might have hoped to be. You see Nicodemus could watch the television media preachers and be very impressed at their rather discrete miracles. You notice how discrete they are. They do heal some people I suppose with hearing problems. Nicodemus would be impressed with those signs and wonders that he might have seen or indeed out on the street somewhere, but when it came to this one-night seminar Jesus said that's an attention getting device oh Nic. It's not worth much. You've got to be born again. I'm not interested in signs. He said well, a little later on in the class there is one I'm going to tell you about, but let's say I'm really not terribly interested in that. I'm interested in your being born from above. Nicodemus has to shake his head again because that first tells him that the security he had and the proof that he found about this new rabbi are somehow not proofs at all. There is something unsettled about his relationship. The teacher and the student are now in some kind of tension because what he had thought would be a good building block turns out to be a mill stone hung about his neck. Jesus said, I want you to enroll Nicodemus in a class called Faith and Imagination. I want to see if you can imagine the only sign that I want you to take hold of, said you are a rabbi and you have studied Moses. Nicodemus tell me about your burning bush. You've got a burning bush or is it about to flicker out somehow. Is your understanding of God [four square?] or does it have any curves in it? He said specifically Nicodemus you remember that story about the bronze snake. It said that Moses lifted up a bronze snake in the desert. Now imagine Nicodemus, that bronze snake is not bronze and it is not a snake at all. It's the lifting up of the Son of Man on the cross. Can you imagine it? Can you imagine the Son of Man also being moved out of a tomb to a fish fry? Can you handle that Nicodemus? Nicodemus is really beginning to shake his head. The teacher says, now good friend, imagine that the news that I bring you about being born again sounds like bad news. Sounds like all I'm saying is that your birth certificate in the kingdom of God is out of date. It needs renewal. You need something to happen. The burning bush has got to take on new flame. You must understand Nicodemus that you are a successful man and a rich man and a proud man and an ethically moral and good man. The old saying goes, if it ain't, broke don't fix it. But good old Nic you are busted. You are out of proofs and you are out of security. You are worshipping a passive kind of lukewarm Christianity that doesn't deal with those scripture even those Old Testament scriptures, which hang in the throat about the poor and the disenfranchised. Go on. Let your faith and your imagination get together and let it be impossible Nicodemus that what starts out as bad news will become good news if you'll sort of turn loose of the scientific religious question about

space. What do you mean from above? This anatomical question about how does a grown person reenter his mother's womb. He's satisfied that that's not possible. Jesus is satisfied that he's going to have to leave this man with these questions and his answers and suggest to him one more image perhaps two. Imagine Nicodemus that you have a radio and instead of having to look at it like this and it's got one speaker that comes this way and gives you the sound, imagine Nicodemus that there is stereophonic sound. That sound comes from everywhere and we even divide the bass and the treble. It's really something. Can you imagine that Nicodemus? Can you imagine that God's spirit and that God is like that. Can you imagine if you're driving your car with that little dinky radio in there and you're going down the road at night and your headlights see a certain distance, can you imagine that this alleged darkness surrounds you is really possibly light if you could only see, if you could only hear that God is like that and that you really are dependent upon hearing and seeing stereophonically. The message has got to come through good brother or your birth certificate is not only out of date, you're lost. You're alien. You're illegitimate. So he leaves it to ponder the good news. Well, Nicodemus pondered. He pondered enough that one night in a meeting at the Sanhedrin he said, well, at least give him a fair trial. Then for the first time he came close to knowing what a refugee and an alien was because they said, oh, is that what you're saying now Nicodemus, you hypocrite, you betrayer of the law. And on another occasion and again at night he says, well, the man deserves a decent burial and I'll help Joseph of Arimathea.

Now is this a success story. Well, we don't know. We know that somehow that one night seminar may have led to the possibly of a faith and imagination seminar or class or course or discipline or view of life by Nicodemus. See Nicodemus is a chaplain. You want to hear me. You understand what I'm saying. I'm talking about myself. He was a good person like so many of you. He's an affluent person. He's a safe person. He has difficulty however with people trying to interpret God's presence in Penelope's and with ghosts and with people who have average grades doing fairly unusual things and being able to call it all somehow spiritual and God-directed. He has problems with that. So he shakes his head, and he wonders and we have to leave the story.

We have to be reminded of another person many, many years later who had a very powerful, emotional, revivalistic experience at [Allsgate?]. But I remind you at the beginning of this term that the cause of his sense of that strange warm presence John Wesley did not give up learning how to translate German hymns into English. He was still a student. Yea verily that warmth was extended to the point that he was a good student of the language. So the call to worship is something he's translated from the German. He translated religion in a very frightening sort of way that would've given Nicodemus and most of us institutionalists a lot of trouble. He started ordaining people on his own. His own brother couldn't handle or hack that.

Charles Wesley never left the Anglican tradition though he was caught up in that revival spirit and in that change of life and that born above, born again business. He was caught up in that, but he did not, he must not have done a lot of watching of *General Hospital*, and he didn't have time to do the channel switching that I do late at night. I mean I don't even have all the stuff you can have. I'd go crazy if I did. Charles Wesley wrote sixty-five hundred hymns. The servants of God your master proclaims. So someone said, well, what are we singing "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" in January for. Well, if you've got enough imagination and enough faith sing it now and during Epiphany while that stack of gold is still in the sack, while your own faith is still a bit cautious and mysterious and comfortable and secure, are you prepared to talk about the resurrection and say so. There was a time when that song, the tune that matched Charles Wesley's words was judged to be too florid, too full of vibrance and spring-like time. It was too much for the church. So they tried another tune or two. They failed. The tune that we will sing is the one that survives. It's the Easter tune. Charles Wesley was born several times. But he could tell you when those times were I'm sure.

So could Martin Luther King Jr. have told you what the times that he was born again and about his dream. But he wouldn't be able to tell you about another black man's dream of being a painter and a sculptor whose work hangs in the galleries in New York and in Boston who undertook to do a bust of Martin Luther King Jr. When that is unveiled today, this artist says for the first time somehow I feel that I'm a part of this country because a part of me is in that Capitol rotunda. So I say Martin Luther King Jr. has been born again. That's frightening, and yet it's so exhilarating to know there's a student at Wake Forest who never dreamed this dream when she was a freshman. She wants to go to China and teach school. Nicodemus would've really sent her to the funny farm if he'd have heard that. There is a person here who sat in his home pondering his own problems and they were many. As he pondered them and he tried to understand what God had given him, he just laughed out loud. Have done with self-pity and be born again. There is a person who wonders how to spend spring holiday. This person is not a student but says maybe I ought to go with Mr. Foushee and some students to the Jubilee Partners and find out about this Central American refugee connection. Maybe that's what I ought to do. That's being born again. There is a person here who is very talented and very attractive and very blessed and at one point very depressed. What caused this person to be born again? This person learned about a certain artist in another field of art, none of whose paintings ever sold while he was alive, the painter who, an artist who killed himself. But for this person the message of that artist's work is hanging there. Be born again. Work through the darkness of the depression and even the sense in which our religion binds us and keeps us in chains. Being born again. Getting beyond the burden of affluence. There is a student at this university and I know there is more than one for whom affluence is a true deep burden. He didn't cause it. It happened to

him. It's not a result of his virtue. It happened to him. What's he supposed to do with it? Well, Francis of Assisi is one model and he hasn't decided to take all that his father has and just go give it away and not go back home. But he is struggling with a lifestyle. How can I cope with what I know in my heart and what I see out there and what I hear? How can I be born again? Now that to me is a very positive sign. This gospel, this starts as bad news. It seems to appeal to the lame and not the healthy, to the blind and not the sighted, to the poor and not to the rich, to the unwashed and to the unlettered. Indeed let us be doers of the word. But you see at this place there are people every day who are searching and looking for and answering those kinds of questions. Whether they call it being born again, I think that's what it is. I think it is alive here. This sense in every religious meeting and every religious group an invitation is there to hear God's good news.

On many occasions, not in the recent past, I have said to somebody we're going to have a revival. A what? Every time I have said it, it has become stronger in me to say it. Now if I'm more precise as far as what Steve Shoemaker the preacher for this revival would say that no chaplain, you are incorrect. You are hoping for a revival. You are praying for a revival. If there's a revival God does that. Okay. I am hoping for a revival. I thought I understood what that was until Vickie Tamer said, well, now we need to have some people praying about it. Then I knew I was gone. It was out of control. We're going to have prayer meetings for a revival. That's what we hope. We'll produce something called a strange warmth and intellectual stimulation, a change. When Paul and Agrippa had their seminar Agrippa says you mean to tell me that you think in such a short time I would become a Christian. Paul said, I don't care whether it's short or long. It matters not. All I want is for you to be just like me. How many people by the grace of God would dare say that knowing themselves? I want you all to be like me. That's what Paul said. I want you to be like me. Then he added with a smile, of course I don't like these chains. You've got me. Somehow Agrippa knew the man wasn't in any chains at all. Somehow he knew that he was at peace. Somehow he was free. Somehow he knew he had a story to tell. He simply wanted to invite people to hear his story. The rest was God's business. Yes, I hope we have a revival. I hope that people who are Christian at whatever stage, wherever they are on any kind of road with whatever car and with whatever stereophonic sound they have or don't have, will hear and see something that will mean they are born again. I hope those persons who have not heard that message or have heard it but not acted upon it. Those people are not Christian will hear it and will act upon it. That's what I hope. Yes, that may be awkward in a university community and it may be awkward with some of one's friends. The gospel has to be disquieting and one of its tasks is whether or not it puts you in the position of vulnerability. So you really aren't able to answer all the questions and so you must with Nicodemus have to hear you're out of date brother. You can't make it happen. Your life is incomplete. Well, temptation for good people is that they do not ever know what happened to sin. It's not real. That's for

the people who go out and massacre children. But the demonic in our midst finds it much easier to deal with you and me when we are comfortable. After all cats have at least nine lives they say. Perhaps you and I could have one or two and be born again. END

Chapel Sermon 10/15/87

ED CHRISTMAN: Some suggest the creationists are correct. God created the world in seven days. But alas, God goofed off the first six and pulled an all-nighter, and we do have a mess on our hands. Indeed if we were to allow such witticism to be our point of departure we would find support. For in the sixth chapter of Genesis God repents of his slothful, lazy, indulgent creation alone one night and says I will end it all. But Noah finds favor with God and Noah then gets drunk and curses his home and we are where we began. Whether it took one day or six or six million years. There is a darkness that has pervaded the image of God in each of us. So if we have been dramatically damaged by those first persons we call Adam and Eve who insisted it was not their fault. By the brothers Cain and Abel, what do you mean Lord? You mean that you prefer a stinking sheep to sweet corn. What is it that's wrong with my gift, Lord? God says now Cain what do you mean if you do well in your gift giving. Do you know Cain that it is evil that makes you so say? I determine the gifts and I like whatever I choose to like. You aren't learning your lesson very well. No, he did not. He couldn't kill God so he killed his brother. His brother's blood cried from the ground. When reminded of that fact he said only, oh you mean God that I am my brother's keeper. Whether he said it in that tone or with clenched teeth, the result is the same. He denied God's control. He was sinner. And with his compatriots, other human beings he would fashion an evil world, a world that would lead one prophet to say, I'm a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Woe is me. I am broken. I am undone. My effort to control the world has failed. Wretchedly failed, and the warfare that Isaiah portend is found in Paul's dramatic declaration. The evil I would do I do and the good that I would do, I do not. There is a war going on inside of me. He might have said there is a war going on the world between darkness and light and the darkness does appear to be winning, retched man, retched nation, retched humanity that we are, who delivers us from this bondage to sin and death now called evil. It is little wonder that biblical characters and persons in our own time of all ages sensing the burden and their own failure and their own incapacity to know God's love in Jesus Christ and want to end it all and tragically they do. Such a world then. A world in which killing is a value; a world in which it is possible to send food to the hungry but the greed of the powerful is hungrier, and so the hungry people never see the food. We amass stockpiles of goods but you never see. Evil means we can't feed people because it is

others like us who have to dispense it. It doesn't arrive. A kind of evil which says this violence is the commerce of abuse in families and on campuses and throughout the world. We chronicle the places easily, Afghanistan, Central America, Chile, Iran and Iraq and Ireland, South Africa to mention only a few. We have become so insensitive to the reality that when we are told millions die including the children we simply don't even blink. Somehow evil's way is to suggest that we have no stake in that. What can I do we say? Would that some persons could have known that earlier? What can I do about the railroad switching train that goes through my town and has these boxcars all sealed. I don't know where they're going, but I do smell the smoke. It is as if Holocaust has come in so many forms that in its last retched form we can hardly say it was one person only who did that. It was done. We struggle to respond.

John's gospel talks about a world of darkness and the darkness is measured by the deeds that we do. Hence it's a world in which we do not want the light to appear. For if the light appears, it unveils the darkness of our deeds. It let's us know to ourselves and to everyone else that that image of God has been so badly damaged as to be unrecognizable. Oddly enough the prophet who talks about the one who will come says Jesus will come. The Messiah will come in a form that we won't even recognize. When we try to figure out how this all got started, the fanciful beautiful story of the fallen angel ironically called Lucifer gives us the framework of the struggle which John's gospel tells about light and darkness, good and evil and war within and without and everywhere. The darkness, the world, the people, us, rejected. Put in its most simple terms if Jesus were to be here today, we would kill him again. Is not crucifixion the only testimony we need to establish that evil is, and what does it matter if it's origin, if we do not even care for our brother and our sister. If words of kindness and words of compassion and truthfulness cannot be the very watchwords by which we live, why should we be surprised that any turn of events, any shaping of the world that gives us even more darkness than we might have imagined before.

John's gospel says there is an alternative. Bring your resumes, your spiritual resumes John says. It doesn't matter whether you are a rabbi, a Samaritan woman, whether you are poor or rich, you have political power or not, whether you're young or old. Bring yourself to the fountain of light and of hope. For Jesus has offered a very special prayer for you and for me. I do not Lord God want these disciples and followers in the first and twentieth century to be removed from the world. That's not the point. Why did I come? I came to embrace the world and I will embrace it totally, which means I will embrace its ugliness and its sin and I'll be the victim of its evil. If they're not to know joy, if they're to know release from bondage, if they're to know who I am and what light is, then they must be so prepared, consecrated. As Ken read the scripture, dedicated, means set apart for whatever it takes to say light is greater than dark.

So the prayer is not that you be taken from the world but that you be sustained in it against the evil one, against Satan, against the powers of darkness and the ruler of this world. But alas do we believe the promise that that ruler has been vanquished that the sacrifice has been made, that the price has been paid and that there is an enormous cleanup operation going on. Can we believe that? Can we somehow fashion ourselves as instruments of light and believe that that prayer really means each person on a sacred journey is a part of that answer, is part of that protection. Where did we come to the erroneous conclusion that when God created us individually, he created us to be separated from one another. The prayer is offered for all disciples no matter where they are or whom they are. The prayer is offered for us together. We are the protection for one another. We are the light that let's the person sitting next to you know that there is still the possibility of hope. They need not be overcome by despair. The prayer for protection is a prayer for us to be what we have been called to be in spite of all that we see and in spite of all that we hear of darkness. John declares, the light has come and the darkness cannot put it out.

That means many things but it certainly means that we pray for other people. On the way to class, on the way to lunch, as we prepare for bed or as we rise in the morning, whenever and wherever we think of persons, we pray for them. That's their protection. That's their hope. That's their source of life and light our prayer for one another. If Jesus has prayed that we not be taken out of the world, but that we be here to serve in it, then most assuredly would we not pray for ourselves. Unashamedly, retched man that I am, who delivers me from the bondage to sin and death. Thanks be to God in Jesus Christ. We look around this room. We pay attention to who is here so that when we see one another in another location, we can acknowledge that person in some way whether visible or invisible and be reminded that the prince of darkness has been subdued and that God is light and life and hope in us and that when we see one another in class or anywhere we would be reminded of that. We would be reminded of the other person and we will see friends, fraternity brothers, sorority sisters, colleagues, parents and others. We would be reminded that they too are seeking to be light and hope for others exposing the deeds that are evil. Their own and others, not being sure of how to do it except to be sure to hold the bonds of togetherness in the light.

Remember this place, which its legacy is a legacy of hope. What goes on here? Weddings go on here. I've conducted weddings in this chapel that ended in total failure. I have been the minister for weddings here that are beautiful examples of light. The dominate mode is light. It is hope regardless of the odds and the difficulties. We've had memorial services here for persons who've died tragically because of someone else's failure to drive a car very well. The mode of such a service is light and hope, and this is a place to which people come individually and in small groups simply to be nourished by

its beauty and by its silence and by its memories and by its expectations. God prays the prayer through Jesus Christ that we would take advantage of the sources of light and protection around us. This place and other places.

I have heard Westminster Abbey described in such a way as to believe that I've almost been there and almost been nurtured by the solemnity and the majesty and the beauty and the light that's there. Open your eyes to the sources of protection and places, to the music that we have heard this morning. Listen and look at one another and at objects of nature and of things humans have made that can nourish and sustain us and tell other people what you have seen and what you have heard.

Indeed one reads the newspaper, the school paper with some anticipation of the variety that is there. When I was first shown a letter in this last week's paper I took it literally. I don't think I should have. Whether I should or not, I choose not to take the student's statement as anything other than biting sarcasm when he said lay aside Pro Humanitate for Pro (). Lay aside the nostalgia of the sixties and its ideals for what is really real and what Wake Forest is really all about. I guess I am not prepared to give business and accountancy that bad of a name as to take it other than a searing criticism of those whose greed wherever they are vocationally or whomever they be does in fact replace Pro Humanitate with something else, does claim in the spirit of the darkness of this world to be in control of all that is. To which we must add that if it is the ideals of this place and of the '60s and of AD 60 and of AD 33 Jesus Christ is at the center of that hope and of that declaration.

So it is people and it is places, and we bring our resumes whatever their shape and duration, whatever partial fragments of light and we pray for one another and ourselves and we do things. For example we take advantage of alcohol awareness week, which is a demonstration that light can overcome darkness, and people can truly change. They must begin it themselves, but they do not do it alone. They do it in the company of others and most it seems do it with the help of almighty God. At the same time some might see the value and the need to support it whether they have a drinking problem is irrelevant. Participate in order to make a statement of hope that such efforts by those who put them on really do mean that light is greater than darkness.

Peace and justice. That's also happening next week. Another singular example that when we see violence and abuse, whether it is by addiction to drugs or addiction to power and violence, we don't believe anything can change that. In that absence of belief is the presence of evil. Our tentativeness, our hesitation to get involved and to say yes, it can change. God prayed through Christ, stay there and don't be a part of it. Be a part of the change. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. Deliver us from evil. That is what we're called to do. That is what we can do together, supporting one another, being strong in the Lord. Being steadfast and by our love and affection for one another and by our presence and places and

opportunities in which light can shine instead of darkness we weave the fabric of the armor that will protect us all. It is then evil and yet there is light. Stand fast in the light, in Jesus Christ our Lord amen. END

Chapel Sermon 1/21/88

ED CHRISTMAN: May I tell you a story? Going to church is an invitation often to go to sleep, not deep sleep but the kind of nodding which ends with a jerk of the head and deep embarrassment because at least the people behind you know that you have not been paying attention, not this Sunday. Not this worship day for today was different. It was my custom to go to worship. My family had taken me when I was too little to know where we were going. I had become accustomed to being there, and later my friends and I enjoyed being there for social reasons and also because even though we might not say it, we were not sure of ourselves. We thought that perhaps what our parents and others had said about God might help us understand who we were too, to make some kind of sense out of life so we were there. It was our custom to be there. It was Jesus' custom to be there too. I remember seeing him with his family, never talked with him really. But I had a funny feeling, and he was different from his brothers and sisters. The only time I really knew who he was in a direct way was the time many years ago when my father and I went to buy a plow from Joseph at the carpenter's shop and Jesus is the one who sold it to us. On the way home I remarked to my father, you know, I'm about old enough and strong enough that I can help you with this plowing. He nodded approvingly. I said, "Pop, what do you think about Jesus?" He shrugged, "What do you mean, son?" "Well, he's different. He's kind of strange don't you think? Have you looked at his eyes?" My father said, "I don't know what you're talking about. You know you do have a vivid imagination." Well, I couldn't fault that. People always said I had a vivid imagination. In fact some people said I was a little bit weird. It wasn't my imagination that day. If it were my imagination, it was everyone's imagination. None of us knew why the elders had said to this young layman, why don't you choose your own text and read prophet Isaiah or whatever you choose to read and then preach to us. We heard some things about him, but we were hopeful and expectant. After all we had developed the habit, the discipline of participation and the discipline of expectation. They didn't worship something worthwhile might happen. It did. Unrepeatable event occurred. He stood up to read, clear, penetrating, quietly the words they just got to us somehow. So that when he finished and he sat down we were on the edge of our seats. I mean it was almost embarrassing how quiet it was. What would he say? After all we had had some fine preachers. We had good music. We had even had that wild man the Baptist come. He had scalded us for sure. That was memorable. But as it turns out this was to be more important somehow. So everyone was waiting to hear what this man would say having heard about his baptism, some of his teaching, some miracles that he had allegedly performed in

Capernium. We were listening and waiting, expecting and he did not disappoint us. I mean, he had us in the palm of his hand, total control. It was incredible. Then, then he blew it. At least it seems that he did. He started off with some reference, and he said something like no doubt you've heard about me and some of the things that I have done. You would undoubtedly expect me to do some of the same things here. I see on your faces a kind of look of approval like hometown boy makes good. But I need to tell you dear friends in Nazareth that I am not going to do anything here. At least I need to remind you of what the law has told us about Elijah and a famine and all the hungry children, sons and daughters of Abraham. Elijah was ordered by God to go to Sidon and to feed one widow who was not of our race and our belief. What was he talking about? There was a kind of a restless stirring among the people. That look of approval or that sense of connectedness seemed to break down in the faces of my colleagues, and indeed I didn't know really. But like the good teachers that I have had in school, they always repeat the important points in their lecture or their sermon. He said listen up. Once upon a time there was a terrible plague of leprosy in Israel in fact all over the region. Many of our brothers and sisters were diseased and the prophet Elisha [Eliseus] was ordered to go to Syria and to cure a man there, the only person he cured. But his leprosy was too much. He had told us these words about good news and gospel and liberation of the poor and of the captives. He had said this was the acceptable year of the Lord. This was the time of God's salvation, of God's people. Then he can only talk about aliens and foreigners, ordered the prophets of God ordered () to help those people. The intensity of feelings was still there, but it had changed. Before I knew it people were out of their seats dragging him away from the place of worship saying unchurchly things and certainly acting unchurchlike in their fear, in their anxiety, in their anger. It is as if somehow given the chance to be God's person in that place he had betrayed them. I was too scared to go. I sat there alone too scared to stay. What did he mean? Good news to the poor. Liberation of captives. Is he talking about emptying the prisons, sight to the blind? Was he going to cure everybody in sight? Surely not. I have to know. So I easily found the way they had gone because outside the footprints were in the sand and I started toward the direction of those prints, but I didn't have to go very far because I began to see people coming back. As I drew closer to them, some of them were looking at the ground. Others were just staring off into space. None of them were talking. I had to know. I recognized one of my teachers from school, and I went up to him and I said where is Jesus? What happened? He just shook his head and put his arm on my shoulder and walked on. I had to know. Then I spotted my mother. Mom I said, where's Jesus? What's happened? He went away. What do you mean he went away? Why, that was a lynch mob. She said I think so. I think they would've killed him. I think that was their intent. But when we got to the edge of town near that hill, everything got as quiet as it had been inside, then just walked away. As we walked home I knew that I was different. Something had

happened to me. Unrepeatable, unique, I didn't know really what it was. But I was thankful that I had been there, thankful to have to ask myself, what does it mean good news. What does it mean sight to the blind? Does that mean anything more than physical sight to physically blind people? Is anyone else blind but those people who cannot see the sunrise? Liberation to those in prison. Does that mean more than emptying the prisons of the inmates? Who's in prison? What kind of prisons are they? What kind of expectations did we have of this young man when he stood up to preach? Did we think we knew the creed that he would espouse it and that would comfort us somehow? Who's in jail? Who is blind? This is the day that this scripture is fulfilled. This is the day it is true. This is the day it is real. What is he talking about? I am so thankful for the custom of going to church for the discipline of participation and the discipline of expectation. I'm so thankful for those who encourage me to go, and I'm so thankful for those I have encouraged. To discern, to know, to feel who got in and who we are and what is the connection. Is Jesus the Messiah? Surely he must be. If so then I must know, I must know what that means. What about you? What about you? END

Chapel Sermon 3/3/88

ED CHRISTMAN: Roses are red, violets are blue. Sugar is sweet but it may hurt you. This is an age of calories and cholesterol. This is a time of worrying about bypass surgery. This is a time in which if diet books had calories, many of us would be very, very fat. This is a season in which we should take seriously President Hearn's suggestion that our concern about the body and about our health can be a form of idolatry. Indeed he even suggested that religion had moved from this building to the cardiac rehab lab and that Paul Ribisl by name is now its high priest. I recall one of my early and less than pleasant encounters with Paul Ribisl. That was in the days when I used to run maybe three or four miles. He and I and some others were returning from the Gardens, and I was struggling up that last hill and as he ran along up beside me. He took hold of that unmentionable phenomenon around one's middle and said, "Chaplain, I am sure that the body is supposed to be the temple of the soul, but do the walls need to be this thick?" [laughter] Since then of course I have looked in the mirror and wondered and perhaps that question that graces the ideal way to begin the suggestion.

But in Luke's gospel there is the possibility of thinking about two kinds of food both of which are sensual to take seriously, but not too seriously, whether people are obese or obese or anorexic and to ask ourselves whether or not during this Lenten season when we spend a great deal of time thinking about what we give up, perhaps in balance and perspective you may need to give up giving up and see ourselves in the light of two ways of looking at what we eat and where we eat. It seems that the commentators have found a theme in Luke's gospel about food. Jesus, one commentator suggests is either

going to, is at or has just left some kind of meal where interestingly enough some encounters and revelations occur that are worth reflecting upon during this Lenten season. Another commentator makes it a bit more pointed. He said that Jesus ate his way to Calvary to which we might add and perhaps Emmaus as well where in the breaking of the bread, the end of the Lenten season is discovered in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First, there is an encounter at a meal with some distinguished people. The first thing and the only thing they notice about Jesus is that he did not wash upon entering and before he ate. Cleanliness we say is next to godliness. What kind of cleanliness and what kind of godliness would allow people like ourselves who are ritually bound to some ways of doing things in seeing Jesus or in seeing any person we would be blinded by whether or not they had practiced ritual piety. This is the season in which we ask ourselves and certainly it's thematic for Luke, what is the connection between ritual and righteousness, between the things that we say and that are visible and what we feel inside. On that occasion Jesus suggested to those whose faces revealed their shock at the fact that he was unwashed. He says consider the inside of the cup and whether or not your worship of certain Mosaic Levitical practices means you've also been fed by what Moses was trying to tell you with those rituals. The inside of the cup tells us how we actually believe and live. Beware of ritual purity lest the cleanliness of which you speak will be next to the ugliness that's inside. The unwashed Jesus is a part of the portrait of what it means to be a ().

Then there is the back of the bus Jesus. Jesus tells the story again at mealtime about a group of persons who invited to at dinner--let us say as in my case invited to a dinner for Congressman Schroeder of Colorado. Oh I am puffed up to get the invitation. Should I go early enough to figure out where she is going to sit so I might get a seat here? Jesus said once upon a time some people got invitations to a fine dinner and they went and found themselves a place at the head table only to be deposed and told they had to sit somewhere else. The back of the bus Jesus says be grateful that you're on the glory train, whatever part of it you inhabit is immaterial. For indeed the banquet table is on level floor, and the table itself is level and whatever distinctions there are in talent and prestige are really immaterial. Pay attention he says to whether you've been invited. Well, that's not too difficult, but then the kingdom picture becomes a bit more strident.

The kingdom of God, Luke says, is like the impolite Jesus. Imagine being invited to dinner and then telling your host that all the people there but you should not have been invited. That is not the way we start out even after the salad. Simon had invited a number of persons. But incidentally Simon was really interested in Jesus out of curiosity for as the story unfolds he did not even occur to him the amenities of the day providing water, providing a kiss, providing some oil or perfume as a signal of expectation and appreciation that he had come. The meal begins. All the right people are there. Everybody is

comfortable with their food until we see standing behind Jesus a woman well known for she lives in the street. That's how she earns the money for the alabaster jar of oil in her shaking hand. Everyone stops in mid-conversation. What is she doing here? She answers the question they haven't even been able to ask out loud. She is crying. She is kneeling. She is wiping his feet. She is pouring oil on his feet and wiping them again. She is repenting. She is asking forgiveness. Simon had no idea that that was the purpose of the dinner party, and suddenly the tables are turned and Simon is no longer the host. No one dares speak but Jesus. Simon, he says, do you see this woman? Do you see this woman? Do you only perceive her in terms of who she has been? Do you know what's going on Simon? Have you had enough food to eat so that the blood is stirred so that your heart and your mind can focus on what's going on? Then he turns to the woman, and he says your sins are forgiven. Go into peace, not in peace. Go into peace, into the liberation of your life. You have embarrassed yourself before the whole world on behalf of your own future. Head still bowed, face still tear stained she hurries out into the first day of her life.

Far side Jesus. You would expect a Far side Jesus wouldn't you? Because he, Jesus says the kingdom of God is like the people who invite the persons that don't have any expectation of being invited. Once my parents and I were invited to the governor's mansion in North Carolina. I was nine years old. Just to put it into perspective. It was Governor Hoey's first time, and it was the first term of Thad Eure, fifty years ago. Mrs. Hoey showed us the silverware from the USS North Carolina and my parents were certainly impressed, but I wasn't impressed by the fact that my uncle who worked in Internal Revenue had gotten us the invitation. I said to them, what are we going to see upstairs? She said, "You don't ask the governor to see his bedroom." Pushy, ungrateful, well, Jesus said the only reason that most of the people are here are because they are grateful for the invitations they have already received. It's a pie for a tie you understand. It is the commerce of having presents with no names on them at Christmas so if someone brings you one, you can match it. It's the feeling sometimes when people do things for you that you don't like it because then you are obligated. Jesus says, put out your finest china. Fill the dining room with good food, and then invite the people who have no china and no dining room because you see if they come, they can't come out of [law?]. They can only come out of grace, thanking you because they cannot do otherwise. All you can do is to know that you have thanked God because you had the opportunity to do something for other people, to feed them at least one if not two kinds of food.

Then we come to the text in which Ray has read. So tempting to refer to Myers-Briggs at this point, INFTJT, all those wonderful categories. I admit to their value, but I must say with Mark Twain as regards these categories, all generalizations are untrue including this one. When I read some of the surveys and try to figure out where everybody is and how they make

decisions, I think of the person who observed, when you come to a fork in the road, take it. Jesus comes. Martha is scurrying in the kitchen. She is a master chef. The table is beautifully set and suddenly she realizes she's doing it all and Sister Mary is in there on the couch listening to Jesus talk, and it angers Mary the hyperactive, overachieving person. There is this overfocused person. Doesn't even know anything is going on in the house except listening to Jesus. The Lord says Martha, relax. Don't you know that I'm eating my way to Calvary. One entrée will do. Why don't you sit down and rest a little, listen. Is it possible during this Lenten season for us to listen? Is it possible for those whose ritual purity blinded them to not see Jesus and think of him as unwashed and to try to shape their rituals to relate to their righteousness? For in Luke's gospel that there is any clear message it is that there is a relationship between the hungry who don't have enough food to eat and those who might enter the kingdom of God because they have cared enough to try to serve him. That kind of food is food of hope of the kingdom's table. Is it possible that while people eat having heard Jesus judge them and call them white washed [coons?] with deadmen's bones inside that they might consider changing. Is it possible that some people would not be quite so pushy and eager to be seen in the right place with the beautiful people. () might simply be grateful to be wherever they are doing whatever they're doing. Is it possible that the Far side people are the near side that the kingdom of God's got more of those strange looking creatures? I mean would you really want to sit down and eat a meal with some of those weird looking characters portrayed by Gary Larsen. The kingdom of God says why don't you think about that possibility? Why don't you think about meeting people whom you don't know, living with people whom you have not heard much good about, eating with someone in the cafeteria that sits alone? Not everyone who sits alone is overfocused and is meditating and is reciting Latin phrases. Some of them are there because no one wants to eat with them and they're too shy to ask. With whom do you eat? With whom do you live? Who will you invite to chapel? Do you know the people who are here? Does it matter? The kingdom of God says it matters a great deal. It matters whether or not you believe in being nourished by the two kinds of food that the people actually change. They actually repent. They actually set their lives in order. They actually care for what they ought to care about.

The kingdom of God is very much like a familiar piece of the most quoted scripture, the Lord is my host. I shall not want for anything that I really need. God leads me in the paths of righteousness which means God sets the table before me in the presence of my enemies. Now that's a surprise isn't it. Have not the tables been turned when the kingdom of God is described as a table set before your enemies so you see them and they see you. Little wonder then that the person who wrote that psalm says my cup overflows. The goodness of this nourishment spills everywhere. Certainly it is goodness and mercy that shape this table. Certainly we could imagine ourselves being nourished. Martha would say to herself, well, it's all

right to sit and listen. Maybe I should listen as well. After all Mary does usually do the dishes. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want for anything I really need. He sets the table before me in the presence of everything and everyone I cannot comprehend and with whom I do not necessarily want to associate. The far side and the near side and the back of the bus and washed and unwashed, all kinds of people. Might we not think about that. Think about ourselves and those we care about and those that are strangers to us while we eat the simple meal together, while we remember the prayers and the music of our lives. After we have distributed the elements, we shall pray the Moravian blessing together. We shall eat and we shall remember who we are, creatures made in the image of God for a relationship to the almighty giver of all gifts of all food. About this time of the year many years ago Jesus fed a lot of people on a hillside, and he fed them enough of every kind of food that they were full. END

Chapel Sermon 4/28/1988

ED CHRISTMAN: Do you know that it has been twenty-five days since Easter? Does it seem like two or a hundred and two? How many days to graduation?

(CONGREGANT): Fifteen. [laughter]

EC: Can you imagine that there is a period of seven weeks between Passover, which this year was the same time as Easter, and the festival of the harvest, which ancient Hebrews celebrated at the end of the season of harvesting wheat. Seven weeks. Taking some liberties we compress it into three in order that the academic calendar and the church calendar can be one. For is this not the season of harvesting your best thoughts and your best deeds for the academic lords of the classroom? Are they not prone to ask you in the terms of that familiar hamburger commercial, "Where's the beef?" [transcriptionist note: slogan from a Wendy's commercial during the '80s] Is that not the question of Pentecost? What is the substance of your religion? The disciples had been asked to wait, to pray, and no doubt they wondered why are we waiting? What are we waiting for? I suppose that when Pentecost came and the ending was over, they still wondered, and they certainly when they observed what took place about which Peter spoke, and they said at least the prayer oh Lord what is this? What shocking and astounding events? What awesomeness? What off-the-wallness is going on here? What incredible sense of something we cannot comprehend? Indeed this is not of our making.

With the ancient Hebrews, no doubt they could understand it must be God speaking from the mountain as fire. So an earthquake, wind and fire is not even close to the name of a modern rock group. It is what was rocking the entire group of persons who were there assembled in Jerusalem about which Peter would then offer the first sermon. But what do we say of

Pentecost? How can we compare it to something else that we may know about? There is the ancient story, which is ancient only in terms of when it was recorded, not in terms of it being unlike our own time. A story about men and women who anxious and concerned about who they were and their identity, fashioned for themselves a tower. For they wanted to demonstrate imagination and skill and cooperative venture. They too had a sense of how they would be connected to almighty God. God destroyed their unity and their tower became rubble. Suddenly they were as distrustful truly as they perhaps always had been except for their limited desire to put some identity together. The Tower of Babel, is that somehow revisited. Some of the commentators suggest that in this Pentecostal event, which appears on the surface to be so much of a frightening and scattering of life, such a multiplicity of things happening that it is videotracks in spades that it couldn't possibly be a unifying experience. But alas what they held in common was not simply the means of livelihood. It was that God had inserted godness one more time. As Peter said it is an end time and is this not an end time. Would that the news that we watch were only entertainment so that we could say it is not so. This is an end time, a time of violence and greed and destruction and brokenness, and the more languages we know the less we trust them and the less we are able to trust one another. I mean who is to choose between the persons warring against each other, and who is to choose between those persons within ourselves at war and unclear and broken and uncertain. This is an end time. So if that pile of rubble called Babel is still here and our dependence upon our ability to fashion for ourselves something that is secure. We desperately desire and want to believe in something that does not change.

So when the chaplain leaves the library with a pile of books, he can hardly ever show whether they have been checked out or not. But the person at the desk wants fervently to believe and if I can't trust the chaplain to be stealing a book, there's nobody. Pentecost says, don't trust the chaplain. Don't trust any ritual. Don't trust any activity which is fashioned solely by human beings. Let the startling and the awesome and the unwieldy event of Pentecost dare to suggest coherence. For out of that rubble and out of the end time and out of our desperation and out of us finally acknowledging that we cannot put the world together. Humpty Dumpty is off the wall. So where are we led? Either with the kind of determinism about disaster that is analytically described by some of my colleagues very recently and then they insist they are not pessimists or the quality of life is based upon whether or not we can respond to God's offer of poured out graciousness, poured out hope, poured out life to be lived no matter what you do with it. It's what you be. Do you dare to be a person who would not analyze Pentecost but would only understand that God's spirit has been poured out. The writer of Luke's gospel is the writer of Acts, and in Luke's gospel it has Jesus say, and the spirit of God is upon me to preach good news for everyone. Peter seizes upon that to preach the first sermon, but Peter wouldn't say he had seized on anything. Peter would

say I was grabbed. Are you kidding me he would say? This impetuous, impassionate man who was coward in the face of a crisis, who thought he knew everything and knew nothing but how to cut off the ear of a soldier. No, I didn't do this he said. The spirit of God has told me to be bold. Oh you say that I am going to sit with my enemy and say to Cornelius the Roman soldier God is no respecter of persons. The spirit of God is upon men and upon women and upon old and young and all can preach and all can prophesy including Peter. I think that's what took hold of him so that he would reach back to the Hebrew prophet Joel and see in that prophesy a sense of what was happening one more time. God cares and God's power is great enough to build something out of the rubble that we make of our own lives if nothing more than our boredom and our frustration and our carefulness, a kind of foolishness is it not of which we heard so well last week, a kind of foolishness that gives us the freedom not to be afraid and not to calculate what will happen if we do this and don't do that. A kind of Pentecostal resume about which we heard too.

Can you imagine a Pentecostal resume? What would it look like? What would it sound like? Would it fit on a sheet of paper, eight and a half by eleven? Can we in all of our efforts to understandably try to fashion some kind of doing skill task resume for ourselves overlook that doing is only a gesture for what's inside and who we really are and what we ought to be.

Thirty-five years ago this harvest time I was grabbed at Wake Forest. I knew what I was going to do at least I certainly thought so. All the pieces except one was in place. But even though I had no job, I was sure of what I was going to do. Then it all suddenly changed. Just like at Pentecost where some of the people there thought all this that was going on was a simply another Pagan rite of spring, they were all drunk, just as that was true in the first century Palestine, it was true for me. Not everyone understands earthquake, wind and fire. But you see I can remember and I shall never forget those days. Something happened to me. So that what I was going to do with my life became what I was going to be and what I had to be was open without fear to a future that I could not shape and had no awareness of. Now does that happen to me solely because I was going from law to some kind of professional religious work. I certainly hope not. I certainly hope that Pentecost tells us there is a fundamental difference between doing missions and being a missionary wherever we are, whomever you are, with whatever clarity and questions you have.

The question is, are you prepared to let God be the inviter, the host for your life who gives you nourishment and gives you a sense of joy and a sense of hope and a sense of coherence. Are you prepared for God to change you, to renew, to do whatever God would chose to do with you. Now on many occasions individually and from this place I have suggested that because human beings are over anxious and because we do try to shape our lives and because we do run into ambiguous and difficult situations, indeed because we sometimes fail at our tasks, that what we ought to do in the vernacular of a fall sport is

to punt. I still believe that. But the seasons of the church year include a season not to punt but to participate, to open up one's self to the possibility that one's life direction or what one is going to do has to be subject to what one is going to be. Without fear, but certainly with trepidation and dependence upon God one might decide to participate in life in a way that he or she has never done before. Do understand that the prophecy from Joel does make it very clear. You're never too old or too young. It's men and women who preach and prophesy. It's everyone no matter who they are, whatever their economic or social condition, religious, () they know or do not know. It's everyone to whom God's spirit is offered so that whatever one's relationship with almighty God, however it can or cannot be adequately described in words, bent it is but not broken brothers and sisters. Pentecost says come. Heed these startling physical signs and pay attention to what's going on when you're studying and when you're saying goodbye to friends and when you're in Davis Chapel and when you're hearing music, pay attention. It may be earthquake, wind and fire, and you may discover in that strangeness, which no one else necessarily recognizes, that somehow you're drawn together with two thousand plus years of persons who have been drawn together by God's eternal music of Pentecost. The spirit of God was poured out on everyone and those who saw it and those who heard it and those who felt it said, yes. I will be God's disciple. END

Chapel Sermon 9/1/88

ED CHRISTMAN: The question has been put how was your summer and my rather () answer is I don't know. It ends until September the 21st. In the midst of academic gymnastics of dropping and adding I hope you will retain chapel and we will find a place for you to sit. We also hope that you will fill out the cards if you haven't already done so and ushers will now pass the baskets as I begin my remarks. Putting your name and your mailing address and the name and address of anyone that you think would like to keep up with our schedule, and if any of you would like to serve in publicity or worship leading or music, then so indicate it.

This is a place where the wind blows where it will and if God so chooses. It's appointments include if you'll look in this direction at a window crafted by a German stained glass window maker and represented to us in the form of a banner by an artist who lives here in Winston-Salem. Those of you who are liturgically minded know that my seasons are all mixed up. This is the symbol of Pentecost, tongues of fire. Well, most of you are gone when the tongues of fire come for Pentecost, and besides it's the only banner that in any sense lends itself to the suggestion of what Kim had mentioned to you. The wind blows where it wills. God blows where God wills and we do not know from whence it comes or where it goes.

Nicodemus had a sense of that. He wanted to talk to a colleague. He thought of Jesus of Nazareth as a colleague who had been introduced to him by the many deeds and all the amazement that had swirled about his presence. He was mistaken. This was no colleague. This was the Christ. This was in that sense no friend and no brother. This was God's presence. Now why do I make this distinction. Imagine if you will the doors bursting open and a bearded man with unsheveled hair comes in and thunderously says to you repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Now there was a time those thunderbolts from John the Baptist had hit me I think I would've been on my knees for the rest of the service. For in the line of the prophets and quoting Isaiah who upon a visit to a temple had what some would call a nightmarish experience. What he had been drinking or chewing on to imagine God in the terms he imagined him. Nothing cozy and quiet and peaceful. Nothing he could manage. That's what makes prophetic words always disquieting and uncomfortable and ironically only in the discomfort and only in the judgment does one ever sense the presence of God's power and God's hope to change that.

The first of the prophets Moses taken from his place to another place. To be the custodian of plagues and of the people and yet his own birth was saturated with innocent blood because of a fantastically fanatic pharaoh who had heard something of the story and was bedazzled by it to the point that he would kill innocent children in an effort to stop the story. That's repeated with Jesus, that beautiful stable was stained with innocent blood because Herod couldn't imagine letting all the Hebrew male children reach maturity.

It was the same Jesus who in the temple amazed those who were there. Oh they did like what he had to say and they were fascinated by it. Yet they were the same persons who were terrified when he came back to the temple with a whip in his hand and it sealed his fate. How dare he disenfranchise and dismantle our institution? This is the same Jesus who insulted his host by saying this harlot is a better hostess than you are. She treated me with the kind of respect that I was owed and she bowed herself in her sin and asked for forgiveness and all you want Simon is to figure me out. Then he hosted his own dinner party. Somber and quiet with the shadow of death across it, and what did those disciples say. They said the same thing that I would say if Jesus were to walk in here and sit down. Would you say or do something religious? Not me. I'd be afraid to try. For in the presence of this personage of God I would try to be still for fear and out of respect I would not know what to say or what to do. Well, Nicodemus comes and what does he discover? He discovers that Jesus Christ would dismantle him in order to build him. He said your biological birth is incidental. You must be born from above. You must be born from above yourself and beyond yourself in a way you haven't imagined. Nicodemus said how can that be? The answer of course is it can be because God be and God is. God blows wherever God blows even on a person who arrives out of

curiosity looking for a colleague to find a savior. The distance between Nicodemus and Jesus begins to grow in order that they can come together. The negotiation has to be I do not know Jesus Christ in terms of knowledge. I know him in terms of a relationship. I am on my knees, and I am awestruck, and I do not understand and knowledge is of incidental value in the presence of power. The conversation ends with the question, how can this be? Does that not remain our question?

A student who graduated last year is waiting for something he said to grab him. An administrator said to me yesterday I want God to knock me over the head so I will know what I ought to do and be. Of course we want to know. Adam and Eve wanted to know. They wanted to control knowledge. Cain wanted to believe that if he raised beautiful ears of corn, God would reward him. Those who built the tower said let us prove how well we cooperate and build something that God must surely honor. Job wanted to know why suicides, why drunken drivers killing Wake Forest graduates. Why does a student die when he's cutting his grass electrocuted by a weedeater. Why? He demanded that God tell him and God did not tell him. What do you say to the mother bereaved? You say read the book. Struggle. Cry and ask only that God will be present. When we come to try and control our lives as most assuredly we try, we discover that the power of God changes us so that knowledge is incidental to the ultimate direction of who and what we are.

I can still hear the whine of the fluorescent bulb. I can still see the printed page notebook, the text of a New Testament spread before me. It was Romans chapter seven and I read it ostensibly to answer some questions for a New Testament class and only to discover that God's power had taken hold of me. I would do what I know I should do but I do not. There's a war going on inside of me retched man that I am who delivers me from the bondage to sin and death. Somehow I was connected to Paul. I had read the passage before, but from that day thirty-three and a half years ago to this, somehow the scripture has power and authority that it never had before. The seal of the university has the audacity to put an alpha and an omega, a chi-rho in the middle. What in the world for? Is it not so that we will know that whatever we do here Jesus Christ is the center? Whatever we learn, whatever joy, whatever sorrow, whatever success, whatever failure is to be mediated and understood by the fact that Jesus Christ did something other than die on the cross. He spoke a word Mary to a person and she knew that her weeping had become joy. He said something in the breaking of the bread and they all knew they were whole forever. Jesus Christ is the power and the wind blows where it wills. Will you and I ever be open to that possibility? I hope so. Oh how I hope so. END

ED CHRISTMAN: The person who believes they spent the most for their books, that brown sack of gold, I will give a gift. I will not tell you what the gift is. In fact last semester when I offered a free meal, strangely enough the person who tallied the most and I never worked it out. I'm not sure because perhaps the person really didn't want to be indebted. After all, spending the most for your books doesn't mean you deserve a gift of anything. But the offer is there, a gift to the undeserved if you dare accept it. Our gift giving and I have been given a gift in the preparation of this sermon by one who is faithfully here who read a meditation about Christmas and shared it with me. To him and to William Willman the chaplain at Duke University I am grateful because Chaplain Willman suggests that in our giving we're often calculating the results or consequences. We want to remain in control. 'Tis true that many years ago there was a youngster who wrapped packages and put labels on names but was prepared for the unexpected arrival of a person who was going to give him a gift and he didn't have one. So when as surely it would happen such a person arrived, he would scurry to his cache of unexpected and unknown gifts and give a person a gift with no tag at all because after all do we want to be indebted to a person we've hardly known and gives us a gift of unmatched proportions in which we give nothing or our gift didn't cost as much. A pie for a pie follows us year round, not only at the season prescribed for giving. Gift giving then has its peril. It is Willman who suggests it is maybe more blessed to given than to receive, but it is much more difficult to receive.

So at our worst we calculate and we control the giving of gifts. You want to be sure that it somehow balances. We don't want any guilt, and we certainly don't want to feel any obligation to anyone who has given us a gift. But alas that's not always the case is it? When we are at our best in gift giving, we give hugs and humor and hope and worthwhile labor. We even give to one of our own a Gumby tree, five feet tall, and it becomes a substitute for the Christmas tree that never got put up. Somehow it reflects a sensitivity and a kindness and a joy and an unexpectedness that fulfills what any genuine Christian gift at Christmas or any time of the year should be. Surveying the collection of neighborhood gifts, plates of candy and fruit, the giver of one special gift of fudge that he thinks is the world's best did remark, well, I gave better than I got this year. We're expressing that kind of calculation, but there was a moment of grace because a son in law said, well, isn't it always the case that you give better than you receive. Flattering dear me by my extraordinary ego trip about the fudge and yet suggesting something more, something appropriate for the season. God gave more than God got.

James says the perfect gift, the man who wrote more of the New Testament than any other, gifted with words, said of the coming of Jesus Christ, the unspeakable gift. Indeed he fleshes that out by saying in the giving of Jesus Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus to which I would add nothing can separate us that matters. For indeed there is darkness and there is pain and there is death. Christmas is a season of somberness and soberness and suicide and

the end of hope and despair for so many that we have to believe there is a star and there is some way to penetrate yet that darkness. God is not separated from us, and we not from God. For God has given us more than we could ever have imagined and certainly that which we cannot control. Isaiah says to his king you want treaties with other nations. You want to give something and get something in return. Let me tell you Ahab. God has a surprise for you and future generations. God is going to give a child on the backside of a hotel in swaddling clothes. Not a treaty and not an army. A strange form of security is it not. Ahab didn't believe that. Who would believe such a story of gift giving?

Jesus sat at a well and a woman who had lost her moral compass thought he said, well, if I have some of this water, I won't ever have to come back to the well again. Then she finally understood that the gift was of living the water. Though she fully did not fully understand or comprehend, she sensed that something had happened that day that changed her or could change her forever. Lord of Lords. King of kings. Isaiah said it. Handel wrote it in music. Prince of peace. The peace that would allow you and me not to feel obligated. The parents say when we come off to school, don't worry about your grades. Do your best. They mean it to the extent that they can give you that kind of openness and freedom, they mean it. Most of the time. But even so is it not terribly, terribly difficult to accept the kind of repugnance that God and parents and friends and teachers and music and art and the world itself gives to you and me. We find receiving God's gift of love unacceptable.

During Christmas I spent time with a person who is terribly dependent, could hardly get around, falls often from his walker, cannot speak in ways that most of us can understand. There is a sense that the mind and the heart are still clear and can't talk to you except on rare occasions. But after about forty-five minutes of my talking about and trying to figure out how do I get through to a man whose eyes had stared at nothing for years, totally dependent. I help him from his walker to his bed and the only two words in forty-five minutes that were clear were the two words, thank you. God has given us that for which we ought to be eternally grateful.

Johnny Carson usually has a Christmas time a little piece the gift to give to those who have everything. As it turns out in reality that those incredibly absurd and very expensive gifts are nothing because those who have everything in fact don't have anything at all unless they, and that includes you and me, can accept God's gift of life itself. So accurately portrayed in a child open and hoping, a child upon whom even in the hymn about bearing the gift of gold, frankincense and myrrh is the clear suggestion that this is not altogether a beautiful story. But God gives to the Samaritan woman water that will quench her fundamental thirst to be accepted. Can you imagine a small child being sent from a farmhouse in the bleak midwinter to the well to fetch water. Having drawn the water from the well the bucket is full to overflowing. The child is

getting cold and rushes back to the house with the bucket, spilling the water all over the ground. That is not, is that not how God has given it to us to be used indiscriminately, offered us love and affection as if it can spill from a bucket.

There are many translations of the twenty-third Psalm. I like the one that we picked, that I selected with certain modifications but with one exception. I really don't believe the translator understood when the translator said fills my cup to the brim. It's filled to the brim only after God's love has already spilled out of the cup, has overflowed. My cup runneth over, and that's so difficult for us to accept and to believe. God so loved the world that God gave us the Son that whomsoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life, but God came in Christ not to condemn but to claim and to save and to give that symbol of life resplendent in the child in swaddling clothes. So what about you and me. At our worst it's a pie for a pie. It's a calculation of gift giving and receiving so that we don't feel guilt, and we don't feel obligation. We are in control. At our best we give Gumby trees and () Gumby men who become Christmas trees and strange gifts and useful gifts and things people don't need because what we really give is a touch or a measure of ourselves. At our best we hear God's message of repugnant and yet liberating grace. So when the kings and the kings come and leave gold, frankincense and myrrh, is that what they do? Wouldn't that be? Isn't that the easier way? Isn't that the human way? Do something for somebody else and scratch it off the list. Say we're even. I know the only meaning of following the star for those persons and for anyone else who would dare come to a stable or to an altar, to a communion table, to worship, to give and receive the gifts that they have been given by almighty God is if they give openly as if we remain stuck to the gold, to the frankincense and the myrrh, as if there's no choice is there but to see that one star as the one star. To see this birth as the one birth. To see that hope as the one and only hope. Indeed what a liberating and freeing experience to give God thanks in praise in worship and in work. To see if somehow we could accept God's love. We'll find a way to express it. I mean there's plenty of ways to say thank you. No one should tell you or me precisely how that is. This is not a sermon designed to list all of those options for you. For in the giving of love God invites you to be as free and open to the world around you and its needs and its concerns so that serving almighty God becomes privileged and a joy and something we can do without fear of contradiction. Do you remember the love feast or if you were not there have you ever heard in the bleak midwinter, a carol of matchless beauty in music and in words. It reminds one of that contemporary carol about the drummer boy who had nothing to give but played his drum and the Lord smiled. For indeed at that point God gets close to what God gave. In the bleak midwinter what do I give as poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would give a lamb. If I were wise, I would do my part. What do I give? I give my heart and my soul, my mind. I give myself to almighty God, Jesus Christ. END

Chapel Sermon 10/26/89

ED CHRISTMAN: Surprise, surprise. The text of the morning's lesson is Genesis eleven: one through nine, which I hope is the story of the building of the tower of Babel, but either I made a mistake or Ginny has. [laughter] The early part of Genesis is called pre-history. Stories that are so true the facts do not matter. Charles Talbert has said of the entire scripture it is to be taken seriously, very seriously but not literally. The text of the morning, we have two ancient stories woven together about building something that would invade the heavenly province and about why people are scattered over the face of the earth. So we have two of these ancient stories or myths woven together. They should be taken very seriously. Let me set the stage. Once upon a time a person met another person from a different cult and was either afraid or quite curious. Once upon a time a person who spoke one language met an individual who spoke yet another and was dumbfounded or anxious to learn because it was a beautiful sound. Once upon a time a person with one set of religious beliefs met a person with another set of religious beliefs and couldn't believe it or said by God's grace let us discern and compare our stories.

So it is with the story in Genesis. Indeed this entire section of the book has lots of questions. Why do snakes crawl on their bellies and why are they so despised? Why was there this great flood and why does the rainbow hang in the sky? Why do women have difficulty and pain delivering children? Why do we live east of Eden and why do people kill one another and kill even to the point of working themselves to death in order to earn God's favor. Indeed how do they build such tall pyramids like I saw in both Mexico and Egypt, so majestic, so powerful, raised so many questions. It is not possible for me to tell you what I saw except to say that in facing that great pyramid in Egypt the only thing I would tell you is the person who might be a younger brother or sister of one of you said I will climb it for you for just a few cents. He scampered up the mile high pyramid and back in a matter of minutes, and I was very impressed.

But why these buildings? This particular story is about a tower and a city built in a place called Babylon, and this particular tower is thought of as the gateway to heaven or to God's courtyard. One people, one place and one language. They had a name. But apparently their name raised anxiety for them. They were the children of God. That apparently was not an adequate name. They said we are one people and one place. Let us make a name for ourselves. After all we are not fettered by whatever stones we can find on the ground. We now know how to make brick.

Indeed how beautiful is brick. For many months I gazed at the emerging structure out of the ground called the University Center. It was huge. It was great. It was ugly. One day I walked out of Reynolda Hall, and the sun caught the gleaming sight of brick upon that gray stone. Suddenly it was beautiful and aesthetically attractive, and it even had a little

dome. A building, something to be very proud of, and of course you would expect me as I approach my fortieth reunion next year to tell you that we had a student center too. It was a drugstore-like counter and a bookstore at the end and right outside there were four booths and two Ping-Pong tables and the offices of the student publications on the ground floor of a very old building. But no, I am not saying well, we're building such a new building. We're bound to be overly proud.

That's not the point of the story. The point of the story is that these persons had discovered brick and they were very excited and they wanted to build a building and so far so good. But they wanted a name for themselves lest they be scattered across the face of the earth. Single-minded then, all their energy and all their talent devoted to this one task. If someone had said, oh I tell you. I prefer a ranch-style temple, spread out across the ground with an atrium in the middle, open to the heavenly hosts. No way. It would be somewhat like someone saying I wonder if one of these days soon when Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola have drowned everyone in a sea of syrup and sexy ads that they will then merge and we will have one drink, Pe-co. I prefer Royal Crown Cola.

Apparently as the story unfolds we find that God prefers diversity to having one translation of the scripture and one hymnbook to sing praise and one order of worship and one kind of prayer and one kind of vocation building the tower into the gates of heaven. But they proceeded for they were afraid to be scattered over the face of the earth. They had not read the other tablets you see. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and when the ark landed, it burst open and the three sons of Noah and their spouses populated the earth, separate tribes, separate cultures, separate languages and cultural anthropology was born. God apparently wanted diversity of speech, diversity of persons, all kinds of colors and shapes, one allegiance to almighty God. That didn't seem to bother God, but it did seem to bother this one people with tunnel vision. The bible has its marvelous sarcasm (). This almighty God creator of all the universe comes down. You've got to be kidding. Comes down from where? This almighty God, creator of the universe, giver of life and love is afraid, has to execute a defensive maneuver. You see Adam and Eve's sin was not that they wanted to know everything and wanted to explore all the horizons. It was that they were disobedient. There is no sin in building buildings. This is not a plea for Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon and the rocking chair porch over Batman's Gotham City in the fast lane. The question is whether you're in Wobegon or Gotham City for what purpose and to whom do you give the glory for the building, for the executing of your labor.

God according to the story was anxious. So God said, they'll know it all if we allow them to continue this singularity of purpose. This allegiance to needing a name, let's confuse them. Suddenly in the midst of the construction as I imagine it, the architects all spoke Greek. The engineers, Latin. All the painters were Italians. Of course all the brickmasons spoke

Hebrew. The confusion mounted and the project was abandoned. Now is God punishing human beings for sin? Yes. But not for what you think. It is not because they wanted to mobilize their energy. It is because they were denying the name that had already been given them. They would not accept it. This was God however intervening in an act of grace to say I shall distract you enough for you to learn and to appreciate the validity of variety, to respect one another, to become dependent upon something other than what you can do simply when you put all your time and energy into one project.

I want you when you meet another person of a different color to be curious, not afraid. The Lord said when you meet a person of a different language, I want you to find the common denominator and to appreciate and learn that language that they would learn yours as well. When you find people of different religious beliefs, I would that you could and would share your faith story and hear theirs as well. That apparently was God's purpose that all would be one, but they would all be different.

This summer Jean and I made a trip to the Finger Lakes of New York and in that connection visited Rochester, a city of much history and richness of religion and culture and social gospel. The tour guide told us the familiar story we all know about how one of the millionaires built a giant structure to adorn the city's skyline. But alas, another millionaire in another business built another building, one story higher. Of course the first one had to add a story and you know that one don't you. How could that possibly be, brothers and sisters, to the glory of God. For a long time we had only one building adorning our modest skyline here in Winston-Salem. It was the Reynolds Building, attractive enough and suitable for what it symbolized until one day a large building was built right beside it. It was glass, and it was square and it was modern and people said of it, well, that's the box that the Reynolds building came in. They scoffed at the taller structure. Indeed if you were the financial officer of Reynolds you could have been very proud of being the smaller building having this giant shield against the wintry wind reduce your heat bill considerably.

For what purposes do we build and what is it that we build? Well, here at Wake Forest we are building [builders?]. We recently dedicated the Olin Physical Laboratory. We thank God for the dreams in the dreamers and those who sustain those dreams. We thank God for the people who shared in planning the building and those who actually built it. We gave thanks to almighty God for the people who will inhabit it and use it. We said may they confirm what we already know oh God of thy universe and explore and imagine what we have yet to grasp of thy mystery and wonder and majesty. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. A cornerstone if you will of building. Now we can adorn any cross with the Chi-rho and we can have the seal on the front of the *Howler* and everywhere else. What does it mean? What it means is that we would dare to claim the name and give thanks to almighty God for all that we have however imperfectly we do it and how easily we are distracted by

our need for having our own name. Some would have us build towers. Some would have us build homes for people who have no home and give glory to God not to Habitat. Some would have us build a fine, fine academic record through study and labor and be thankful to God for all the teachers and all the persons who have made that possible and know that it is as one said recently, who received a Rhodes Scholarship, "When I came to Wake Forest I was not a Rhodes Scholar." But he left yet grateful for what he had become and incidentally prepared even now to change his academic direction. His getting of grades had not destroyed the spirit and willingness to change. We might build houses. We might build a splendid academic record. We might build relationships and covenant groups and other small relationships with other people in which we respect them and listen to them and tell our story and hear theirs whomever they are and at whatever stage of belief and whatever color they are and from whence ever they come. The people from New Jersey come to terms with sweetened tea. The people in North Carolina come to terms with that staccato speech and hearing people talk about the shore [pronounced with northern accent] instead of the beach. Understand that some people wear jackets and some people wear coats and some people have supper and some have dinner. All of us have an opportunity to use Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of building everything that matters and everything that lasts. How do you know that you're doing that? Well, certainly you do keep before you the symbols like the seal. You remember it chastens, it compels and it invites. As Judith Kay said at the ethics symposium on Monday night, you give more than is expected and you take less than is allowed. I would say that you would hope for others as much as yourself and you would work diligently without the need for praise. You would risk your level of risk would rise for the things that matter and your need for security, one person, one language, one place and you would let that subside. You would be grateful and give thanks to God for whatever building is going on and in you and in others. You would have a sense of peace, it seems to me, a sense of confidence that being a creature and not overstepping the bounds into creator is a liberating experience and allows you to explore and get to know toward whom you are explored so that you could imagine a table, a banquet table. Surprise, surprise who is there at the kingdom banquet table. All kinds of people, many of whom on earth were imprisoned or in somebody's insane asylum. Some of whom couldn't read or write, some of whom were blind, some of whom had all kinds of crippling and frightening diseases. All kinds and shades of people at the banquet table. So like little boys and girls, black and white, holding hands together saying free at least, thank God almighty we are free at last to be thy children. Every one of us can build buildings inside and in the world in which we live and be God's tenants and preserve the land and preserve the relationship and expect wonder and power and majesty to come from that obedience. Under that sacred () of that marvelous, marvelous [raiment?]. END

ED CHRISTMAN: Once upon a time God passed over the homes of Israelite slaves in Egypt and saved the race. For they were the chosen people of God. But they were chosen to be acquainted with grief and to suffer. Whom would God over a thousand years later choose to suffer, to not only be acquainted with grief but to become grief, pain and even death itself.

Jesus, setting his face towards Jerusalem, seems to have been drawn as if by a purpose, intense and unrelenting in where he was going and for what purpose. What did he remember of his childhood such a sacred and beautiful moment of which we sing in advent? What did he know and what did he think about? What did Mary, the mother of Jesus, ponder and consider about this child, this first born child of hers? Even children twenty centuries later know the happiness of a Jesus who said suffer the little children to come unto me. But they also knew of the Sabbath. Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus took a whiff and began to cleanse the temple for he said, this is not a sleaze bag headquarters for people who would turn religion into acts of fear. Indeed if you only knew that these lambs with which you trade are trivial. I am the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The disciples came together and they did not understand at all, but certainly they must understand that a suffering servant is a humble servant who washes their feet. But not all understood. Indeed the heady words and heady wine left them asleep. Such bizarre scenes as this contemporary portion of the Lord's supper has the Lord covering the bread as if it's his own body and flesh and blood keeping it, but the child at the front holds behind his back the twigs which become the truth. Such a somber scene we rarely associate with the Lord's supper, which we still want to be a pleasant evening meal. This skull-like representation comes closer to the reality. Yet Jesus the person, the man whom they knew, who suffered, with whom they could talk, whom they could see sweat, who they could hear laugh was also a cosmic figure. Somehow they knew he was not like them. But when the time came, they were asleep. Jesus was alone that last night to hear the sounds of evening, to smell the sounds of the night, to be still and quiet, to grieve in his own alienation and potential separation from God. That silence was broken with a kiss and the stormy coming of the truce and two trials which ended with his carrying his own instrument of destruction to the killing field. Man's sorrows, not acquainted with grief, but embracing it altogether. What about the prince of peace, the king of kings and Lord of lords? For him it is a crown of thorns. Even children know about the crown of thorns. They know as we all do of the brokenness. This is no simple death. This is destruction and sin and death at its worst or at its best depending upon your point of view. Crucify him. Even children know crucify him. Yet one modern interpreter would like to get beyond that sordid and bleeding moment and send Christ skyward. I say again, crucify him. The face of passion, of suffering and of death. Jesus died. Jesus was dead. END

Chapel Sermon 5/3/90

ED CHRISTMAN: There was a story making the rounds, God got tired of the whole business and decided to bring down the curtain or as Bill Cosby would say, everybody out of the pool. So he called certain newspapers so they would have a little advanced warning. Noon tomorrow, the Lord said, morning *New York Times* said, "World Ends at Noon." Complete details in section C beginning on page sixteen. The *Wall Street Journal's* cryptic response is "The Market Will Close Early." *Washington Post*, "World Will End At Noon. This will be particularly difficult for women and minorities." But *USA Today*, "World Ends At Noon." Sub-headline, "Hey, we're out of here." We're out of Jerusalem. We were there when they crucified the Lord, and we're out of here. We're on our way to Emmaus. The weekend was the worst nightmare. The dreams have been nailed onto a cross. This is the third day. Oh there are some rumors. The women tell us he is risen or at least the tomb is empty, but no one has seen him. We're out of here. Back to whatever us followers would do and believe because our hope is just about gone. What are you all talking about Jesus said to the two travelers on the way to Emmaus. They stopped dead in their tracks. You've got to be kidding. Get serious mister. You appear to have come from Jerusalem. You are the only who doesn't know what has happened this weekend. Jesus of Nazareth, preacher, healer, teacher, taught, tried, crucified and now some say raised, but we don't know that, but it is the third day and that was the promised time. You don't know anything about that. As an aside, Jesus would've observed that their faces were sullen as if they had been on a fast for several days, and they were actually not just talking. They were arguing and discussing what did these events mean or what meaningless have we been caught up in the last little while. But though they were a bit unkind and inhospitable to this man for his apparent lack of knowledge, he responded rather directly. You know you all are rather dull of mind and spirit. I don't see any dean's list people here. Are you surprised of what has taken place? The resurrection appearance begins for them without them knowing it for the teacher begins to teach one more time. Beginning with Moses and through the prophets. He recalls for them that the prophets said that being the loyal priesthood of believers means both what would be a curse and a blessing, persecution as well as salvation, and that suffering is the gateway to life itself. You've been too selective you dullards, he said. Read it all and remember it, but what I see are long faces and very short memories. But they could handle that, these two unnamed, unknown disciples. Hey, don't go ahead. Come, the day is far spent. Come have supper with us. They really insisted and Jesus set a table, and they gave him the bread, and he blessed it, and he broke it, and he gave it to them and they knew who he was. The meal was left uneaten for they had been fed, and the seven miles even in the growing darkness was like a short hike for they were on fire. They had something to tell. He is risen. They break into that tomblike room of fear and failure that the disciples and the apostles had fashioned for themselves and told their story. Resurrection

begins with comfort. Mary, the name is called, and the grieving is met with concern, and the concern is not simply to say who he was and for her to recognize him. It was to give her a task to do. The therapy for grieving is to focus somewhere else on something else, go tell the people, all the people. It would be as if she had gone bearing the good tidings of a newborn child and that cry of joy was unspeakable. He is risen. The job of the teacher has been continued. That's what he was doing with the folks on the Emmaus Road. Plowing that old ground, one more time. Reminding them of stories about change and all things new, reminding them, telling them oh would that their eyes would be opened and their ears unstopped, and they would see and they would hear and they would know there is something new under the sun if you only would believe. So the teaching picks up where it left off and the comfort is there. The message is given to groups of people so that no one person has to bear the burden of knowing and believing it for sure without proof by themselves. The certainty of the uncertainty is shared with believers, and the company is big enough for Thomas, even for one in absolute despair like a Judas. There is room for all to hear and to nourish one another in their singing and in their praying. There is something that holds them together even those that say I'm going fishing.

Cast your net on the other side comes the voice from the glimmering light of new day on the shore. As they struggle to bring the net in somehow, they know what has happened. Sit there beside the fire and their host, and they could hear the lapping of the water against the shore, and they could hear themselves eating fish and bread. No one will say the word. They know who it is. No one will say a word. Resurrection appearances are compassionate so Jesus breaks the silence. If you love me, then tend to the sheep and feed those who have no way of feeding you because they have no house in which to feed you. Maybe you even build them a house. Tell them your story. Get out of here. Get out of the tomb here. Predictability, think a new thought. Do a new deed. If you love me, you will love the face of every person you see and every heart of one that you might touch, if you love me.

Now what makes the scripture so powerful because it is so truth telling is that in the midst of this high moment, it has really come true. On the third day he rose from the dead, the mortal who became immortal. The promise is a fact (). Even then bless our dull little hearts and minds and anxious spirits. John records that one of them looked over at John the disciple and said ,aster, this poor fellow looks a little sick, a little like he wont make it to the great banquet table. Is he really going to die before it all comes to a wonderful [celebrative?] conclusion? The sharpness of the resurrection is clear. Mind you the Lord said. Mind your emphasis upon a trifle. If he lives or dies is up to me. It's no concern of yours. What is a concern of yours is whether you follow me. When you go out of here whether this is your first or last year, what are you taking? What memories? What long faces? What food? What failure? What success? What relationships? What are you taking with you

that gives you a new birth of wonder that allows you to hope and believe for that which you do not see and cannot nor ever will be proved?

Speaker came here a few years ago and spoke at Groves Stadium, titled the sermon "The Twenty-six Proofs of the Resurrection." I thought that was about twenty-six too many. Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a proven fact. It is a reality that people recognize and they know if it could be proved, there would be no choice for us to, make would there be? Since we do want to survive. No, no proof. But what memories. What messages from this room, from this campus, form your relationships with faculty and with each other. What do you take with you?

This week a student said my prayers are like water running in the sand. Scripture doesn't make any sense. I don't, I quit reading the bible. I'm around people who don't believe. I have been to majestic churches that are more like museums. They're empty. Suddenly he said, I don't have any faith in God. He could cry about that. I said to him, you're on a sacred journey, and this is part of your trip. I understand. The psalmists understand. The apostles understood. All of Christian who are honest understand prayers that run in the sand and are not living water. Times when reading the scripture is it's nothing. As if God is dead and there is no answer to the question about those who do not choose to accept Jesus Christ. I understand. I hear you. I've been there. I know about depression and alienation. I've been there. I love you, which is to say I hope for you. I mention one person that perhaps he could see where he was and might help. I reminded him of his family who loved him and nurtured him and still do. He said, that's all I needed, man. That's all I needed, someone to tell me that it was true. He said, we'll talk some more.

What are you taking out of here? Because you know you do have a choice. Shel Silverstein tells you you've got a choice. You have a magic carpet that will take you anywhere through the air, to Spain or Maine or Africa if you'll just tell it where. So will you let it take you where you've never been before? Or will you buy some drapes to match and put it on the floor? The writer who is most popular, one of the most popular among you has made us all think a second time about coming to school because he said everything you ever wanted to know you learned in kindergarten. He concludes his creed by telling us what Jesus would have us know is the way to hear and receive and respond to the resurrection. When you go out there, hold hands, stick together. There's a lot of traffic out there. Beware of wonder. Look for it. Get out of your tomb brothers and sisters. Get out of there. And then by the grace of God we're out of here. END

Ed Christman, Chapel, May 3, 1990

Chapel Sermon 11/8/90

Repeatedly visitors say you look so young. I have to remind them their eyesight is dim. I then acknowledge there is something about this work that makes me wonder if it is work. Let me give you an example that laughter is immeasurable. This week we received a note addressed to the campus minister. "In terms of your ecological concerns that we not cut down too many trees to make too much paper, I would respectfully request that you cease and desist from sending me any more mail." If any of you are not getting a tree in your mailbox and would like to, do let us know, but I do think this imaginative response to our weekly cards or other things we've been sending, don't you think it deserves at least one more piece of paper. Imagine what we might say.

The ancient prophet Habakkuk cries out to almighty God. This is what he says. Oh Lord how long must I be called for help before you hear me, before you save us from violence. Why do you make me see such trouble? How can you stand to look at such wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are all around me. There is fighting and quarreling everywhere. The law is weak and useless and justice is never done. Evil gets the better of the righteous and so justice is perverted. Habakkuk's name meant one whom God would embrace, a common name in his time which many parents gave to their offspring with a prayer that it would be true. Our child would embrace God, and in embracing God we might infer be helpful to others, be a helper, a counselor. That's what he seeks to do in speaking for the people. But of these words of 600 BC or are they from the morning news? Violence rampant on every side. The law is weak. Pernicious crime everywhere. The face of justice twisted into a cynic's smile.

Whether it is then or now it is the advocate's role to state to almighty God what we cry about, what we grieve about and what bothers us in the very depth of our souls. Indeed such a plea deserves a response, doesn't it? This is what the Lord said. What is the use of an idol? It is only something that a man has made, and it tells you nothing but lies. What good does it do for its maker to trust you? A God that can't even talk. You are doomed. You look to a piece of wood and say wake up or to a block of stone and say get up. Can an idol reveal anything to you? It may be covered with silver and gold, but there is no light in it. Habakkuk is pleading for the people of God who are asking at least for personal security but secretly and more openly the assumption of chosenness is blessedness. There are blessings to follow being chosen. Therefore their status in 600 BC and our status today seems to raise a very serious objection to God's way of doing things. Does it in truth mean that being chosen means being chastened? Who is it that is going to be condemned? It is those who worship the idols and not almighty God. But it seems that worshipping God is not like that stretch of road near Davidson College, Seventy-seven going south, beautiful open country. The road is straight. Even I could drive a car on that road. That secure, that serene. Is that

what it means? Secretly wouldn't we wish it were that way? But we know that what Habakkuk says is true. After the prophet has allowed a little bit of time to elapse from having heard the awesome word of God, there is a choice to be made even for those of you who are chosen. He quietly says, God is in his temple that everyone keep silent. In the silence of those moments, whether in or out of the temple, whether it was a restless night of no sleep, whether it was while he was looking at the majestic beauties or listening to the majestic sound of God's nature in some context Habakkuk had to respond. On the one hand to the evil round about. On the other hand to the reality of idols that we used to try to bridge the gap between our sense of what we ought to be like if we are chosen and what God should deliver and God's promise of turmoil and trouble and yes, blessing. What does Habakkuk say? Even though the fig tree bear no fruit and the grapes grow on no vines, even though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no grains, even though the sheep all die and the cattle stalls stand empty, I will still be joyful and glad because the Lord God is my savior. The sovereign Lord gives me strength. He makes me sure-footed as the deer and keeps me safe on the mountains. Those who heard these words were at least for a moment given a sense of peace. It was as if Habakkuk had determined to be the solo handbell player that would peel the words of joy and pierce the despair that surrounded them and was choking them and the very life out of them. If for only a moment they could know that there was such a thing as peace, there was such a thing as contentment in the brokenness being brought together. Their hearts were rent asunder. But something in the words of Habakkuk echoed something that was in the very marrow of their bones. Habakkuk the contemporary of Jeremiah with his majestic phrase I shall write my covenant upon their hearts. Habakkuk was saying I shall speak of the covenant of God's presence and power as if it were in the very marrow of our bones. No matter what happens, no matter what the hardware of the world is prepared to deliver, that sense of hope will abide and somehow, somewhere, sometime it will be well. It will be well with my soul.

John chronicles the last week of Jesus' life called the Passion. They have had supper. There has been the washing of feet and the passing of the cup. Now Jesus prepares his disciples for the final exam. Bringing together and reminding them all over again in very simple language what it has meant for them to travel together. They are very quiet. The flies buzz around the uneaten food because it was not a night they would enjoy the meal. They were reminded of something. That the separation from them and almighty God in Christ was near at hand. It was as near as the presence of Judas sitting there. The tragic course was unspeakably present so they desperately, desperately tried to listen to what he was saying. He said the world gives you a kind of peace. It offers you solutions for problems. Sometimes they work for a time. The world offers you solutions that are lies. It tells you that a nuclear missile is a peacemaker. We all somehow seek to believe and hold onto some sense that yes, we can figure this out. I am the master of my faith. I am the captain of my soul. Yet, somehow what

Judas and what all of us in our lesser moments strive for, this sense of power and deliverance from problems and toil and trouble, that sense of power is drenched with blood. It always fails to deliver.

Jesus offers his alternative, his software into incredibly simple words. God's power comes wrapped as my peace. How in the world can that be? One clue would be found if we reread a simple story in Genesis. Moses the escaped murderer has found a marvelous life in Madian. Married, two children, tending the sheep. Something happens. So he goes to his father Jethro and he's carrying with him a stick, which may not really be a stick, something else. He loads his wife Sephora and the two children and some of their belongings and he says to Jethro I'm leaving. See I've got to go back to Egypt. I'm supposed to go and convince the elders of a half million people that I am their leader even though I stutter terribly. After I do that I'm going to go see the pharaoh and I'm going to say, let my people go. If he doesn't let them go, I'm going to tell him that God almighty is going to kill his first born child. That's where I'm going Jethro. Having stuttered out the words and Jethro having listened, what does that man say to his son in law who's taking his daughter and grandchildren and carrying nothing but a stick and a stumbling praise of what he's going to do. He says go in peace. There is no interpretation but that Jethro believes God goes with this man. And that indeed he may well see his grandchildren grow up. Go in peace. So Jesus says, I give you my peace not as the world gives it. I give it to you as energy, as the energy of remembrance. I give it to you as a spirit which will ever keep you remembering this night and any other time when your heart felt together, when your sense of contemplation and revelation were such that you knew your life counted and you were at peace in your soul. I give you a spirit, my spirit which will utter the prayers you can't pray because of toil and tribulation. That's the spirit. That's the advocate. That's Habakkuk's marrow of the bone reborn and brought to them. Jesus certainly knew they needed it. He says my peace, why that's my salvation. That's my hope that you need not fear anything, but the world will make you suffer. It matters not how much academic success you have had. It matters not how much you have put yourself into human relationships with your peers and seek to bond with them. There will be hurt. There will be brokenness. There will be toil and times of trouble, and yet my peace is with you, and you need not be afraid for the marrow of the bones comes alive. They sat there and it was as if someone began to sing that ancient song or say it in some words, and even if all the sheep were killed and even if the cattle stalls stand empty, I will praise the Lord. I will give thanks to God who is my strength so that I am as sure-footed as the dew wherever I am. After a little while we might imagine Jesus commanded his disciples then and now. Let's get up and go from this place. Amen. END

ED CHRISTMAN: Adam and Eve were surprised to discover the nearness of God. Near enough to realize that they had fractured the relationship with the almighty. Cain was surprised to discover that God was arbitrary, choosing sheep over corn. Cain was surprised to discover that God was not arbitrary, that God did not kill the one who killed his brother, but tattooed him with violence for all generations. Sarah was surprised to discover that she could lie about laughing and bear a son who would do God's will. Jacob the trickster was surprised that he could be out-tricked, but his name was changed and he limped away, still surprised with God's person. When Joseph's brothers came looking for food to Egypt, oh were they surprised. Here was their supposedly dead brother holding their fate in his hands, and he said, you are forgiven. They were surprised. As was Moses. The stammering murderer was told you are going to lead my people from under the Pharaoh's shadow to the Promised Land. Moses was surprised to discover that in that leading and in that victory at the sea, Miriam could dance so well. Even more surprised to realize that along with Aaron, she had administrative talents, but most of all, Moses was surprised when his older sister challenged his authority. David perhaps was not so surprised when Nathan told him who he was. But he was surprised that a contrite heart meant he could pour out his heart in psalms that would last forever. God could still use him. When that law which he had helped construct was lost and then suddenly found in the rebuilding of the temple, some were surprised, but not Josiah. He turned to () at the prophetess and said does it really mean what I think it means? She said yes. That was it. Isaiah was surprised that the new convert to God's faithfulness, the first thing he was to do was to tell the people they were fractured and broken too. The later Isaiah must have been incredibly surprised to link suffering and death with Messiahship. Jeremiah was surprised he lived so long considering what he had to say over and over and over again. Elizabeth and Mary were surprised to become miracle mothers. Zebadee was incredibly surprised when his sons left him and his fishing nets to follow the itinerant preacher. Pharisees were surprised and perplexed at the parables especially those about including all kinds of people in the kingdom of God. Peter was surprised. The coward becomes a rock and Saul the prosecuting persecutor becomes Paul the premier proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene heard a name, and she knew who it was, and although it was an incredible discovery she was not speechless and she ran and told the others. He is risen. In the beginning was the word and the word was God and the word was with God, and the word was the source of everything that was made and without him nothing that was made was made. He was as life and life was symbolized as light in the face of darkness but it was a light like an unquenchable fire that could not be put out. The light became flesh and blood, unrecognized by most, accepted by some and this light, this life changed those persons into the children of God heaping love upon them as if it were endless, grace upon grace. Now what of the darkness, which seems so all pervasive in scripture all the time. For those who read it and those who do not, right now it

seems incredibly pervasive. That fractured pair at the beginning and that wonderful Cain, our father. Violence, everywhere.

So what do we say to this?

It's not surprising that I could call the information desk last evening and the young woman that answers, I ask her, how are you? She says not so well because I know someone who is in that wilderness. We talked a little bit about that, and I reminded her of this chapel and of our worship and of the vigil candle and the one that would also be in the meditation room one floor above where she was working. She thanked me and she said now, what number did you want? I said, I didn't want any number. Oh okay. It was easy to find the person who was precisely addressing the question of what in the world does all of this mean? From the very beginning of this week it has been obvious that we are bonded together, interdependent, much in the way in which Martin Luther King Jr. described us all made in the image of God, all of us and not alone. The darkness then therefore is something about which we need not speak at great length except to say that in addition to the recent events there is the ongoing darkness, which perhaps we will become more aware of because of this crisis.

We will become aware for example that parents of people in this student body have or are dying of cancer during the fall semester and over break and that many of them are unwilling or unable to turn to anyone else for help unless you are the one who encourages them to do that. The darkness which says in truth that a family dissolved at Christmas time when one of its sons was on his way to Saudi Arabia. It's incredible. Unspeakable. Darkness. That persons continue to abuse themselves and throw away their opportunities for life and light and hope recklessly as if there were no hope, as if they did not care about themselves or others. Oh yes the ongoing darkness. These events of the recent days bring to the surface memories of many of us that are painful and unspeakable. So that not everyone who was in the chapel on Tuesday could utter a name that had a name and some for those of you who were there and remember could only say it in a whisper so that it had to be repeated.

So what is our agenda? It is to declare that this is epiphany, the manifestation of the Lord Christ, and I offer brief prescriptions on what we do and what we be, not only in this crisis but in any time. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and the word was the instrument of all creation. That does mean that if you pray, you pray for Saddam Hussein and for his advisors and for his soldiers and for his children, his own immediate family and for all the children everywhere, if you are to understand the biblical message. But you pray for people, and if it is the creation of which we are concerned, then you pray for it as well and its renewal and its not being destroyed. So you pray. You take advantage of provided opportunities, and you fashion your own knowing that if the whole creation groans and travail the spirit of God will help you phrase a prayer. The prayer is oh Lord, and God will fill in the spaces. You study a marvelous

opportunity--I hope you don't see that as a cynical statement and ironic--a marvelous opportunity to begin the semester of study in lab and in library a little earlier than we had planned if for no other reason than to let your work be a profound distraction from the burdens that are about us. You go to the meeting at four o'clock this afternoon at the Benson Center to learn about the darkness and the light of volunteering and helping other people. You look around at persons whom you know who are burdened beyond reach, at least they think, alone and alien to any source of help. You nag them. You trust God's grace enough to say if they tell you they don't want to hear it anymore, then it's all right to keep on telling it. Reach out to others knowing that there are campus ministers here, that there are faculty here, that there are people in residence life staff, that there are people in student services. There are all kinds of people who will help you and will help me. If it is true that God has created us all and without Christ's being the word of God there was no other creation. There was no other instrument of creation, all of us together.

Because I've alluded to Martin Luther King Jr., you take advantage of one more opportunity to gather at Benson Center on Sunday evening and light a candle. When you walk with your peers to the chapel and you hear the choir sing and you go to the library and you get some books and you read about Dr. King's message of peacemaking and redemption. On Monday you go to Wait Chapel and you hear the first alumnus, the first black alumnus of Wake Forest talk about hope, and you attend some of the sessions that afternoon, which inevitably are connected to darkness and much more appropriately to light.

If it says we are children of light, that means you fashion a button or you buy one, you make a banner, you argue, you discuss you dissent, you affirm, that which you believe and you look for help for that which you do not believe. You engage one another, take advantage of the numerous opportunities that will be provided to express your feelings and your ideas as a community. You learn about the draft whether you are for it or against it. Students and faculty of light are not afraid to take unto themselves the mantel that Christ has placed upon us.

It says in the text that Christ was not recognized by most persons. For as the psalmists had already asked, where is your God? Of course the partial answer is that God is in the suffering. God is in the pain. God is in the unlikely persons and places so the children of light, children of hope will look there and be keenly aware that this is a renewed opportunity or the first opportunity to embrace the love of God in Christ Jesus and to believe and to pray for help for unbelievers. G. MacLeod Bryan professor emeritus of religion has written a piece which some of you have seen entitled *Against the Odds*. The prescription is to be against the odds, to believe in peacemaking. For as Dr. Bryan observes it is only the children of God who are empowered or who would dare to believe in peace when the vote is unanimous against them for darkness. Peacemaking.

This is the season of epiphany, the manifestation of the coming of the Christ who was not still born but became evident as life and light and hope where there was no hope who changed persons. The mythological parents like Adam and Eve and Cain and the persons who could lie to God and bear children like Sarah and a whole lineage of persons through the ages an unbroken thread of connection of persons for whom surprise was the clue. God was near us. Oh we want to control don't we. We don't like surprises unless they're all good. The Bible says be prepared for all the surprises and for the ultimate surprise of which Mary spoke teacher, rabboni. Don't touch me, he said. Go tell the brothers and sisters what you have seen. So the born the Christ is alive as we are alive to the opportunities to study and to pray and to worship. The regular religious opportunities are still here, and they need nourishment and you need theirs as well. Yes, we're looking for someone to monitor or someones to monitor this candle, keep it lit. We are looking for some persons who would say yes, we'll see to it that there are some spoken prayers at twelve-forty-five every day in this chapel. You know I'm always looking for ushers or for other persons to say, come and worship at eleven o'clock or come and worship in this place or in the Benson Center or on the playing field or anywhere persons who will be light and life and hope. For the light could not and will not be put out by darkness because the light is the light of God in Jesus Christ our lord. Amen. END.

Chapel Sermon 9 /12/1991

ED CHRISTMAN: The Bible does not have any multiple-choice questions, not even that tough one that says, choose the answer that is more correct than all the others. The Bible however does have even harder questions and more haunting ones than any of those you have taken I submit. John said, that's the Lamb of God. Two of his disciples turned and looked. Jesus turned and looked at them and said what are you looking for? Strange enough they said, where are you staying. He said, come and see. Oh had they only known how simple and inviting a question. Oh so they went to the house late in the afternoon but Andrew couldn't sit still. So he went off looking for his brother Simon, and he told Simon we have found the Messiah. Oh how many times had that question been repeated. Thousands and thousands of times people had thought they had seen and heard the Messiah. It was so embarrassing. But they were wrong. This time, as it turns out, it was the truth. That word means whatever will hold water.

So Andrew found his brother Simon and took him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, I'm going to change your name to the Rock. So he's got Simon Peter and he's got Andrew and perhaps two or three others and Jesus fashions a traveling religious seminar with an extraordinary laboratory. He finds Philip, and Philip knows what to do when he's been found. He goes off to find Nathaniel. They lived in the same residence hall, I mean the same town. Nathaniel, remember

about all the things we read from Moses that all the prophets kept yelling about? Oh we have found the Messiah. He's the son of Joseph of Nazareth. Nathaniel looks at him with a smirk and he says, Nazareth. Can anything good come out of North campus, I mean, Nazareth? Undaunted Philip said, well, come check it out for yourself, Nate, unless you're afraid.

Let's check out Philip and he starts out real well. Here he has met this person. He's made that potentially embarrassing declaration about the Messiah really being here, has named him as from being from North campus, has met a skeptic and he's held his ground. Didn't say anything ugly to Nathaniel, just said, come and see for yourself, an open-ended invitation. He's done real well. Now what do we see next in John's gospel. While we're on, we're over here at Davis Field maybe or a hillside in Palestine. It doesn't matter. There are thousands of people there. Jesus turns to Philip and says, Philip, where are we going to get enough food to feed all these people? I mean, that brothers and sisters, sisters and brothers, that is a tough question. Unequal to the task, Philip blew it as many of us might have. He says, well it would take six month's wages. I mean, excuse me, but that's got nothing to do with the question. Andrew's a little sympathetic. Andrew's a little more imaginative. Andrew said, well, I don't know, but there's a kid here with some tacos. I don't know what's in them but he's here.

Then we see Philip again, probably the last week of Jesus' life. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. I go and prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare it, I'll come again, Jesus said. Philip says, well, Lord if you'll just show us God, we'll believe. Oh Phil, Phil, you've been with me from the beginning. You've seen the light come on in people's faces. You've seen healing. You've seen strange things. You've heard interesting stories you've never heard before. You've seen people believe. You've seen them walk away. You don't know I invited you to come and see God because God and I are one, Philip. So Philip was probably there the night of the supper and the next day of shattering darkness and despair when fear took over once again. The neighbors scattered after the crucifixion. So maybe Phil went with Simon and his brother back to fishing just because he didn't have anywhere else to go. Of course that was some breakfast wasn't it because Jesus was there eating fish and they were, they couldn't say (). But maybe, just maybe, one of those early questions came back.

The first question that Jesus asked, what are you looking for? I think about that question and I'm looking for some friends with whom I can share and trust my stuff. I'm looking for fun without alcohol. I'm looking for a people and a place where you can ask any question about anything and not be ridiculed. I'm looking for something to do. Anybody want to go fishing. Anybody want to go bowling. Anybody want to go find that waterfall Chaplain says is on the campus. (). I want something to do because it has something to do with who I be. It has something to do ().

I called a student this week and got a wonderful answering machine. You're wonderful with your answering machine. Well, some of you are wonderful and the voice said named herself and her roommate. We're not here right now (). [laughter] She said we've gone to do the laundry. Well, there's a little more to do than laundry, sisters and brothers. God says, in Christ, come and see. See that there are people here who don't have much money but have jeans/genes full of dreams, and they're looking and they want to see. Jesus says come and see. Look around the corner. Look into the future. Probe, pierce the darkness. If you're afraid to come Calvin, it's okay bring Hobbes. There's plenty to eat. Come and see. There are people in the residence halls who love you, which is to say they hope for you. Talk to these people.

There is a variety of religious experience here to be had with other people who like yourselves are crying out and don't know where they're going, but they hope for something. There's the Volunteer Service Corps, and they don't ask any religious questions at all. Neither do any of the religious groups for that matter. They say come and see and we will talk about it and we will argue about it and we will plead with each other to understand and we will hope that we have found something. What are we looking for? Well, we're looking for that wonderful Rock Peter, that now famous breakfast. Peter do you love me? Oh yes, Lord. Well, then feed my sheep. Go out there and tell them what you know. It doesn't have to be very much. You may be a partially filled vessel. You may only have an urge, a sense of something burning inside. You don't know the shape of God. You don't know the shape of your own life. You may have come here decidedly broken, but you can connect or you can reconnect with hope and you do that in part by inviting others to join you and say come and see. Come tell the story, the old, old story. We've got to tell everybody of Jesus and his love. Amen. END

Chapel Sermon 10/10/91

ED CHRISTMAN: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre the falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; The centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned; The best lack all conviction; while the worst are full of passion [sic]. Surely some revelation is at hand; Surely the Second Coming is at hand." Is there any doubt that Christ's kingdom is not in this world? Is there any doubt that this is the kingdom ruled over by principalities and powers or according to revelation very specifically this is the kingdom of Satan in which we live? Is there any doubt that God almighty, creator and judge of us all, will conquer and be vindicated at last?

The text is from the last book of the Christian testament. The last one and the least read by many and so well misread by so many others that many of us, including myself, have shied away from it. Oh we might want to peek into the

cover just every once in a while to see if one of those ghoulish creatures would come out, one of those beasts with a single horn. We might be tempted to hear and actually read about a dragon standing, waiting to consume a newborn child. Well, if we turn to VH1, you might be a little more encouraged or discouraged to peak into the book of Revelation and let some of it spill out all over the place.

In desperation I turn to it because the twenty-five year old graduate of Wake Forest had died of cancer. I was looking for something. I hoped that in the last book of the Christian testament there would be a statement of hope that would meet the occasion of such a tragedy. I found it. I've kept using it. All things new. No more pain, sorrow or death, and I will make it possible for everyone to drink freely of the water of life. So the book of revelation stands. Its testament is so familiar to us in even modest detail, namely that it was written in the time of persecution. Roman steel could not still the martyrs blood which kept flowing in the veins of the survivors, and we are some of those survivors. But brothers and sisters, as I am inclined to call you and hopefully by the end of the sermon you will be clearer in understanding why. Sisters and brothers, we are the survivors, but we have a problem. It's a problem that's been stated to me as recently as last week by a student. Our problem is that in our confusion and in our conviction we do not know whether or not we are being tested adequately. If we were tested by being thrown in prison or being offered up as a living sacrifice whether we could stand the test of that much testing. As I have reflected upon this agony, this genuine felt need for some proof that my faith is solid and strong enough that if tested like those people in Ephesus I would stand with the Lord.

It does seem however that we may have missed the point, and we may be persecuted by our lack of being persecuted. We may bear an undue burden for Christ has called us to make a difference, not the difference. We are called upon first then to examine just how good or bad these folks were in a time of persecution. I'd always thought not having read any of this material that these seven churches were really slugs. I'm filled with persons who were of no count at all to the Lord. Not so. There's only one that comes close. Ironically it's the one that David Foushe preached about a few years ago. Church at Laodicea which resembles Winston-Salem more than any other city () and which does violence to our wonderful nursery rhyme, nursery story about the three bears. You see that bowl of lukewarm oatmeal that we all enjoy. Well, God vomits that right out on the floor. Lukewarmness, you can forget that. We'd rather you be hot or cold he said. But even in the church at Laodicea there is a professed remnant that is in that piece of the letter material that Jesus says, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will open it, I will come in and eat with you, whatever the porridge is of the day.

But consistently the message of these churches is that these persons were steadfast and endured. They were steadfast against false and exploited teachers. Though some to be sure followed them. They were steadfast against the

temptations of immortality though to be sure some abused themselves and others. They endured even the treat of being imprisoned, and they were steadfast in holding up God's name when they saw one of their own killed. Steadfastness, endurance, some of them it says were more loving and more given to their commitment later than sooner as the persecution neared. On the other hand some as Lewis had read in Ephesus had lost that initial zeal of brotherly love and somehow had made a disconnection that's who the () probably were. People have said well, you know, you just need to say these wonderful words about Christ and keep repeating about how much you love the Lord, but you don't have to pay any attention to your brother. Your prayer can be here. Your praxis is of no consequence. That's for later.

So a warning was issues and one of the commentators said if you don't hear this warning, I'll come and I'll take your lamp stand because the light that's gone out doesn't need a lamp stand. But once again bear in mind that these persons were for the most part bearing up under their burdens, whatever they were. Even if the center was falling apart. Even if extremes did seem to destroy the culture of which they were members. Nevertheless these bodies of believers held together.

Now how did they do that? Don't be misled. Because they were ancient persons does not mean that they were any better or any worse than we. Hence the record, a mixed ambiguous record, but the clear message is that hope somehow was the fabricate that knit them together. But how did they stay together? Where was their strength? Their strength sisters and brothers was in the sisters and the brothers. What were their activities? They were two in number for the most part when they gathered for worship. They sang and they prayed. Much to the chagrin of those of us who would like to think preaching was sort of right in the center, singing and praying. I might extend that, laughing and crying and arguing and talking and bolstering one another up. Their strength came when they were about to fall victim to a false teaching to hear someone right beside them singing "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of host, heaven and earth are full of thy presence." So if my conviction would help someone else and tomorrow someone else's conviction would help me and we were nurtured and knit together because we prayed together and we sang together. That's where there's strength. Not from having all knowledge. Not from not being weary for indeed they were. Their strength came because something of the spirit of almighty God was with them in music and in prayer.

So appropriately today we had prayers, sentence prayers. We had a pastoral prayer designed to help us focus on who we are together. We say the Lord's prayer together. We listen to music in another language together. A language ancient and foreign to many of us and yet do we understand that God has spoken to persons of all tribes and all nations and all languages and that for many of them they had no written materials. They only had what they could see in the faces of

their friends and their brothers and sisters. The only what they could hear with their ears and what they could learn to sing and remember over and over and over and over again. That's why the music is there to make a conscious link that takes us back just a half century but in the effort to connect us with our past.

Do you have any idea how important you are to an older generation who knows we're only one generation as the body of Christ from extinction? Do you have any idea how powerful your laughter and your tears are, your failures and your successes? Do you have any idea how powerful your energy is, however directed or misdirected? I implore you to lift from your shoulders the burden of false persecution and false testing. Testing will come. Testing is all around you. To be sure there could be a martyr in our midst, but more likely there are those of us who will persist as did the persons in these modest little churches in present day Turkey 2000 years ago by singing and by praying.

I'm in the office yesterday afternoon, and through the door I can hear some Pentecostal sounds. That is to say— [quite laughter] Oh don't get too nervous. I can hear Pentecostal sounds. That is to say sounds that I do not really understand. Syllables. There is a lot of electricity in the sound. There are people in that room gathering in preparation for going to the prison to pray and to sing. That could have been a group fixing to go the battered women's shelter, to Brookridge, to a church. It could have been a group engaged in late night prayer. It could have been persons coming into this chapel at any time to sing, to pray, to be together. Don't you understand how much you give to those of us who are older because you simply continue to abide and hoping that this story is true?

How do you suppose that Ginny Britt who by her own profession in the paper, made public for all the world to see, has been by anybody's standard an emotionally ill person her entire adult life? How do you suppose she keeps going to Crisis Control Ministry for eighteen cotton-picking years? Ask her and she will tell you it's because of the volunteers who are there who individually would doubt that they have made any kind of significant witness at all. But together they have made it possible for her to hope that it is not in despair that we work for the homeless and the hungry and those who are ill-disposed to live and would rather die, who meets despair with hope and feeds them more than food out of a canned soup.

Oh dear sisters and brothers, are we not linked together by our modest gifts. Are we not every day giving and receiving love and affection from those who, we touch and see? Are we not then the descendants of those who literally and figuratively held on to one another in order to live and to believe that the story was true? This is a story about a person whose eyes are flaming fire, who is portrayed here as in a white robe on a white horse with a two-edged sword in his mouth and burnished bronzed feet of great power and strength. Such strength as in one of the letters it says he takes the door and opens it in such a way that no one can shut it. He ripped it off the hinges so that there could be traffic flow from tribe to tribe

and nation to nation and people to people and Christ would be accessible to us. I am lifted up, not my buddy, brothers and sisters, my savior, overwhelming, unbelievably beyond my comprehension, but the light of his face means that there needs be no sun, nor moon, no stars. The power of the Christ said, and I will make you kingdom of priests to serve.

So we have to have our feet in two places. In this kingdom dominated by the forces of evil against which we must rage in whatever ways the Lord God gives us to rage. But as individuals, sisters and brothers, do not hold yourselves to too high a standard of achievement. Look to what you can do and what we can do together. Make for yourselves some clothing out of very rough material that will last. Put into your purse only those things that you really need. Don't believe too much lest you miss the point. Trim your lamps so that others can see in us the hope which is in Jesus Christ our lord. END

Chapel Sermon 9/2/93

ED CHRISTMAN: Thank you for coming. Thank you especially for those who have steadfastly blocked out this time during this year. I trust that God has blessed you and will bless you yet even this day. The way of the resurrection is through the cross. At the foot of the cross gaze upon agony's face. At the foot of the cross hear the pain. At the foot of the cross lay down the burden of sin, not the sins, but the burden of sin and death and pick up life anew. Crucifixion is the door to resurrection. Without the suffering, without the pain, without the depth, there is no () and there is no hope. There is no life everlasting. There is no resurrection.

Jesus appeared to Paul. Paul was always, it would seem, under control focused upon protecting a tradition and a religion which had been God's people. But his reason had turned to rage because he saw in the followers of the Nazarene an unacceptable interpretation of who and how the Messiah would become the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. He determined to persecute and to destroy those who would otherwise he believed destroy his very life. But something happened, and from the illusion of life that he had embraced, blinded and on the ground, he heard a voice. The light spoke to him and from that prostrate position on the ground he walked the face of the earth, not the Saul the persecutor, but as Paul the proclaimer of Jesus Christ. He laid down even the burden of having persecuted Christ to being Christ's chief exponent. He was able to pick up his life. He was a Jew. He was a Roman, affluent, educated, well placed, a man of reason and style and substance. He said of it after this event on the Damascus Road, it is all garbage for me to live is Christ and to die ().

But if Paul was the man of control and focus and clarity and substance based upon reason and faith in what had been, Jesus would also appear to a person who was out of control, vigorous, probably illiterate, a person so strong of mind and so impulsive of heart and will that one would not, as we might say in colloquial terms, mess with him on the playground.

Peter was not focused at all. He believed everything. He did everything. He always led with his mouth. Occasionally he would say things like, you are the Lord. You are the Christ, the son of the living God and immediately not understand what he had said. Get behind me Satan. You do not know what you have said. This strong-willed person who could have well defended himself against several of the Roman guards wimped out before the fire, cursed the very life of Jesus. () though the accent of his denial betrayed him yet again. So at that unforgettable breakfast the betrayer is told, feed the sheep. But Jesus observed something else in these cryptic words which Kim has read near the end of John's gospel. Jesus observed that though he has spoken to this man and given him resurrection life yet again he was looking around, checking people out, comparing himself with John. It looks like he is on his last legs. The tradition says those feeble last legs of John outdistanced Peter to the tomb. No matter. Jesus said, does it matter to you whether he lives or dies? Are you going to continue and persist in judging yourself by others and their faith or lack of it, their help or their illness, their brokenness, their wholeness. Peter, I said, follow me.

So the resurrection door is cracked open. It doesn't stand full ajar until this same impulsive volcanic person is without lunch, very hot on top of the house, sees what to others would have been a nightmare becomes a vision that God's message is for Gentile, for Jew and yes, Peter if you're hungry you can eat any kind of food that you like. For I say to you, Peter, that it is clean. So his vision and the vision of Cornelius comes together. He says I perceive that God loves all people and offers them all resurrection and new life and this impulsive, often misguided, lack of courage fisherman becomes rock.

Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. It's obvious from her name that she is a woman; therefore, in that day and time a second class person, but Mary Magdalene is less than second class. She is afflicted. Now those of us who are compelled to live our life in the midst of sin and seem to revel in being immersed in it, would like to believe that the seven demons are the seven deadly sins. Who among us men would want some woman to have all of them to herself? No, it's in all probability true that these seven only represents the intensity of her affliction, which was physical and not based upon her sin. This is a person who knew alienation and distance from others for a very long time. We know how we shy away from people in wheelchairs or look upon people who walk funny, who have epileptic seizures, who we know are ill. The discomfort is a reminder of God's broken world, and we'd just as soon not be associated with any kind of affliction especially if it is severe. She knows no company. She is not respected. Yet it is to this person that God through Christ says, the Lord is risen. So she had been delivered of her demons, and she had followed Jesus through the healings and the teachings to the foot of the cross and thence to the empty tomb. Uncontrollably weeping when she finds the body not there. Who are you looking for? If you have taken him someplace she said, you tell me and I will go and get him. () there, and he spoke to her

and he said, do not touch me Mary Magdalene, follow me. Begin your following by going and telling the brothers what you have seen and what you have heard, and she went and told them, I have seen the Lord.

Who among us has not known the level ground of the cross? Family disruption, illness and pain, broken relationships, our own burden of sin which confounds us, our loneliness, our fear. Who has not known what it is to be living as if you can self-help yourself into salvation? Have we not all been there in one form or another? Do we not tend to abide often in the suffering and the pain so that we cannot see anything but the darkness that imprisons us in death. But somehow in some ways Jesus appears. Jesus appeared to a Russian composer named Rimsky-Korsakov, and Rimsky-Korsakov wrote the eastern Russian oratorio, and he includes the pain and the sorrow of death in order that he can compose music that sounds like a thousand birds singing. He said of his work this is like a bright and shining day. It is almost carnival-like the depth of the joy of Easter Sunday.

Some have said in fact as recently as Sunday Jean, and I were at Kim's house, and the person who was in school with us said what have you been doing since retirement? Retirement from what? Retirement for what? I didn't say it quite that abruptly, but almost. I could have said to this understandable question, no, I can't retire. You see once a year I sit in a very special place and I see candles lit and I hear "Joy to the World the Lord is Come." I always remember that one picture that someone gave to us of a parent holding a child, holding a lighted candle wrapped in crucifixion paper. God comes to us in so many ways inviting us to the resurrection. He comes in the listening of music in the dark on a Saturday night in a residence hall room when Keith Levi said, I was changed. Resurrection came to him though it had been hanging around for a long time. In the asking of the questions for which there are no answers, asking them as faithfully as Job and Kevin Taylor, ask them. In so doing resurrection may come.

Resurrection did not come to me in some dramatic overpowering Damascus Road experience. But it did come not at the time of baptism or rededication as a student at the Wake Forest Baptist Church. It came forty-one years ago this month when we had invited a Scotsman preacher to lead us in a revival. All he wanted us to do was keep on singing, "There's a light upon the mountain, the day is at the spring and our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of our king." I was less than a month from graduating from law school, and it was all clearly planned and reasoned out, and I had to tell Jean to whom I had been married for four months, forget it. She had to trust that something happened that week I could not explain but I could not deny. Resurrection comes to all kinds of people in all kinds of settings. Those who are reasonable and very talented lay aside their self-sufficiency as did Paul. It comes to the poor and the less talented whose hearts want to be in the right place and will speak and do what apostles do. It will come to the afflicted and those who have no credibility in society but they say

I have seen the Lord and Mary Magdalene rolled the stone away. Paul found a way to say it. Have this wine in you which was in Christ Jesus being the form of God did not count equality with God, something to hold onto. But empty yourself taking the form of a person, a human being born in the likeness of men, obedient as a servant unto death even death on the cross, and for this reason God exalted him, lifted him up and gave him a name above every name. At the name of Jesus every man should bow, every tongue confess, Jesus Christ is Lord. END

Chapel Sermon 9/9/93

ED CHRISTMAN: This is a sermon based upon advertisements. I hope and pray that the advertisements will be as compelling as some we see on television from time to time. We begin with a story. Once upon a time three students, who had never been, decided to visit an art gallery. They began walking through the rooms, separating, going their own way. But after awhile they found themselves not only in the same room but looking at the same picture. Then they realized there was no one in the room talking. There was no one walking. Nervously they cut their eyes to the right and the left and discovered that everyone in the room was standing very close to them. They were all looking at the same picture. Silence bonded them together. Until then our understandable finiteness somebody coughed. Somebody smiled and someone quipped I wonder what the (). As the group began to disperse, one of the students said, "Let's go get something to drink." Only to be surprised that one of these would be strangers standing by said with a nod of the head, they were going to go too. And sure enough several of the people in this cluster who had been looking at the single picture were seated at one of those round tables with those little, round doilies drinking something cool, listening to the fountain and trying to figure out what these new found friends had in common and what they would say to each other. It was nervous and awkward until they hit upon of course the right thing and began talking about the picture again. Then one of the students looked at her peers and it's time to go and they got up to leave, and then one of the others said, "You know this has been a lot of fun. Why don't we meet again here next week and look at some more pictures." Some of the people said, "Okay. See you here next week, same time." Now is it important to know whether or not the picture was a picture of Jesus or a seascape or an abstraction? No, I think it's not important to know what the picture was, but it is important to try to discern what was its power. Seemingly it was more than a picture on a wall. It drew strangers together and it pointed them beyond each other to something there and yet beyond there, somewhat mysteriously. It was in other words this picture was trying to be a symbol, a symbol perhaps of community building where the gathering together of persons is greater than any one of them could ever be separately.

I hope Paul would approve of this kind of connection with the text to the Corinthian church. But how does one do that in an age as animistic as ours, as individualized as ours where there is understandable concern about money and about grades and about relationships, not necessarily in that order, where fear and uncertainty abide in shadow and give sunlight to most all of the things that we do. How do we get beyond that? Where do we find signs or symbols that would distract us from our insecurity so that we might even for a moment say, it is well with our souls.

Well, there are some persons here who I have to call, closet Samaritans who have come out of the closet. They don't mind acknowledging that they want to show gratitude for the gifts that they have received, and so they are part of some kind of mission. It's out of a religious group. It's out of a social organization. It's from the Volunteer Service Corps and like the person that I have already named, the Samaritan, they bristle if you say how about some academic credit for that that you do at the Soup Kitchen. Or maybe we will give you some money. No, whether they know the story or are motivated by the story or not, the good Samaritan is their example. They volunteer, and some of them would say because Christ was a volunteer, no, the volunteer. I want to show some kind of thankfulness. I want to be a human being toward other human beings. Yes, I want to be Pro Humanitate, but in the context of this school, how must you at least consider looking at that. I suggest you look at it by viewing a genuine symbol. It is emblazoned above the steps in the rotunda of Benson. You walk over it every time you go in the new entrance and the only entrance to the library. It has this Christos symbol with the letters alpha and omega. It has little lines that are the representation that Christ is the light of the world. For that declaration we say we are Pro Humanitate. The root of our motto is in Christ and we should never forget that. The seal is a symbol that calls us beyond ourselves individually to tasks and opportunities for gratitude expression that individually we could never achieve, calls us beyond our concerns about ourselves as understandable as they are. Suddenly after we have come back as many of you have from other places, expressing gratitude, giving cups of cold water, you not only feel better about yourself. You may even be thankful enough to study a bit harder as a further expression of your gratitude. Advertisement number one.

Now advertisement number two, as Cindy said you would hear about the announcements on the back of the program. A friend of mine once said, "What is the future ever done for me?" My response was, "Well, what have you ever done for the past?" How have you ever contrived a way of saying thank you for your past? See many of you understand what I am saying. Ironically some of you and many others carry a burden of gratitude that is like guilt if you do not achieve all that your parents and others who have helped make this possible for you if you don't achieve the very best. But if you can channel that gratitude into something other than the understandable interest in grades, then perhaps you will visit Old Wake Forest. You will take with you your imagination and what it may have been like and your discernment what should from this

sleepy village of spirit and power be captured and reaffirmed in our new place and what needs to be left only for the historians to search. What is it about this wall that one man built and the floor in which we sit while we eat this lunch in the gymnasium, which has its own moments of joy and history and sadness of basketball. What of this ancient building that's nearly two hundred years old that's a microcosm of the old school and the bell, which called people to prayers and to hoeing taters and to reciting Latin declensions? What is this church where we will worship and was started not by faculty members but by students? You take your discernment and your imagination and you know what you will find? You will see in the faces of our hosts' gratitude for one reason only. You are a part of what they are a part of. Wake Forest College/University. You don't have to prove yourself. You just have to get off the cotton-picking bus to see and to feel their joy and their happiness that the bonding of old and new has in this fleeting few hours been affirmed yet one more time.

So it's still possible to sign up today and tomorrow in Benson, and it's possible to come by my office next week and fill out a form that says I am a member of a body. I am an individual person who is valued no matter who and what I am. But I am certainly part of something greater than myself. It's represented in the seal. It's represented in the concrete activity. I know what kind of a month March is, sisters and brothers. I even have a clue as to how much work you have to do. I simply want to ask you whether you need to work at gratitude enough to go.

Now the final commercial has to have an introductory story. I was in a Passion play, and I was part of the crowd. The scene was just before the crucifixion, and we were told to mill about and murmur and try to manifest our feelings at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, anger, fear, disbelief, curiosity. There were no prescriptive signs of what we were to do. Just mill about and murmur and talk. But you see that as you might expect is not () for this person. So as the Roman soldier came this way, behind Jesus dragging the cross, I moved towards the soldier and I pretended to spit upon him. Actually it was a student that I thought was a little bit too arrogant. [laughter] But he was far more gracious. You see he honored my improvisation with his own. Get back old man. For which I'm eternally grateful. He tried in our own small way to say we were a part of something greater than ourselves, the unseemly parts that are to be honored in Christ's sight as much as any person including the person who spoke those lines from the cross. There was no difference. There is somehow a very close connection between a company in a play, a group who call themselves an orchestra, people who are on a team, who would understand this (). You are the body and every person counts.

Do you have any idea what it is like to have missed a cue and to see the Salvation Army band marching across there and you've got the drum and you're not there. By the grace of God it was only a rehearsal. I didn't miss my cue because you see everybody else was depending as I was. Do you have any idea what it was like last week for those who were under milk

wood with the two voices, and if they didn't do their part, everything falls apart. But we're all members and we honor the others by doing our part, the discipline and the courage that it takes and the joy and excitement of being a part of the company or the team or the orchestra.

Paul spoke to an incredible variety of folks. He invited them one and all to be seen as persons standing on level ground at the foot of the cross. No one less or more important than the other. Everyone in the sight of God a part of something knit together and speaking the truth in love as if what they did together was in fact greater than any of the parts.

So during Passion week the twelfth, the thirteenth and fourteen of April, there will be something that's never been in North Carolina before and never, therefore, has been here, either there in that old campus or here, the Promenade Passion Play outside. Next week there will be trials. It will be sort of like going to an art museum when you've never been before or perhaps you were in theater in high school. Or perhaps you did have some experience helping make a play happen from behind the scenes. There are many speaking parts. Most of what we would call the A team in theater are already involved in other things. So you're not precluded from one of the twenty-seven speaking parts. There are other persons who will be in the crowd scenes. There are people who are needed to figure out how to get a kerosene lamp or torch to burn and then how to put it out, at the right time. And people to worry about horses. People worry about crowd control and people to help with refreshments at the end of the each of the performances. Lots of things to do to make this declaration of the coming of Christ in passion and in glory a fact. The director Jim Dodding has said on many occasions there is a lot of work to do. We may be thought of as fools for trying, but I believe it will happen and I know that it will happen. You see he's a very charismatic person. Some of us, if he said, we would like for you to run up the wall would seek to do that. All I'm asking you to do is to look at the announcement on the back of the program and it says there are trials next Tuesday at two different times, and the rehearsals after break will not be overly long. It will be a way of expressing gratitude, a way of discerning talents that you may not even know you have. A way of meeting people, a way of building community at this university. All said you are many members of one body, and you are to drink of the same spirit and you are to share your talents and your time as acts of gratitude to those who have given you life. If you are Pro Humanitate, it is to be because Christ was Pro Humanitate. Encouraging us one and all to speak the truth and love as we grow up into Christ, into the body so that when one of us suffers we all suffer and rally around. When one rejoices, we all can rejoice and speak the truth about Jesus the Christ in love and in hope to all whom we can see. END

Chapel Sermon 1/27/94

ED CHRISTMAN: He was pierced and wounded and broken and destroyed because of our sins. Wounded for our transgressions, his brokenness made us whole. His illness gave us health. Now why would one choose to preach from Isaiah between the second and third Sundays of advent in the midst of Christmastide? Why would anyone dare to say that Isaiah tells us in very plain words we hate God? That is what the text tells us. We turned our eyes from the servant. He was of no account to us. He was so marred and ugly and scarred as if he had been fired by a terrible flame. He was repulsive, repugnant. We would have nothing to do with him. Yet it was through him and by him that we are healed. Now why would we hate God? Why would we turn from almighty God, the giver of life? Why would we allow the image of God in us to be so badly mangled? Perhaps we turn from this image of almighty God in Jesus Christ because we cannot face ourselves. All of what we see in this person called the servant is us, all of it. Specifically there are four Sundays of advent. There is joy. No, there is sorrow in us. There is peace. No there is warfare in us. There is love. No, there is hate in us. There is hope. No, there is despair.

So that I told the story Sunday night of the person who works with small children and says I have given up on all but hoping for hope. That's all I can see. That's all I can do. Yea, verily that that may be enough. But if we can somehow embrace the truth of this declaration, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All have turned against God's gift in us, and we have denied love, joy, hope and peace. We have embraced the darkness of despair and death. So how do we address this sorrowful, yet curiously joyful gospel story. Let us pay attention to what's around us. Dare to look and taste and smell our lives as if they are somehow yet still in touch with God. We turned our faces, but we know that image is still there. We chase all kinds of remedies for problems and none of them bear any fruit. So perhaps even out of the parched ground of our own broken lives the tender plant grows still. We can hope for hope.

Frederick Beakner, a contemporary writer of story and of theological treatise, tells of his own despair on one occasion. Driving down the road he pulled off the road and sat there head down. But his curiosity got the better of him as he heard a sound approaching and he looked up. Here comes a car. Once in view, he focuses upon the personalized license plate on the front of the automobile with one word, trust. He had looked for a sign from God when he had no other signs, no other sources of strength. Yes, it came to him.

Or our speaker of last week who so marvelously introduced us to the advent season told a story about himself at Preschool two years ago. Ed Wilson said I was depressed. It had been going on like an illness for a long time. I had received no relief. I pulled into a gas station. I bought gas and a coke, and I sat in the car drinking the coke. He doesn't say he was

asking for a sign from God. He said he sat there drinking a coke and the despair disappeared. Not ultimately, but the chronic smuggling, stifling, struggling smoke of that despair had choked him nearly to death was gone.

Consider some other signs perhaps oblique to you but real for me. Kim Christman is coming home from Spain and a group of us are going to meet her in the late of evening in the Greensboro airport. David Foushe is one of the group. "Hey, David," someone said. "You've got that Santa Claus suit. Why don't you wear it to the airport?" I'm sure to the surprise of some of the others, David said, "Okay." Imagine a nearly empty airport with a group of persons Jean's age and my age, whatever age that is and some college students talking and having a good time. People are looking at us, but they don't see us. They see the man in the red suit walking with us. What is Santa Claus doing going to Gate Forty-two? He has no bag of goodies. On the way home cars honked at us, tried to pass us. I had the feeling some of them wanted to get in the car with us all because of a sign, love and joy. Something to be remembered.

One Christmas we were coming to our house on the twenty-sixth of December from different directions. One of our daughters and her husband arrived ahead of the four of us, the other four, to a dark and undecorated house. But when we arrived there were lights on, but did we know what the prelude was for? For when we entered the house there was a fully decorated Christmas tree. Now they didn't bring it with them on the top of their car, fully decorated. They drove down Faculty Drive and found one that someone had on the twenty-sixth of December already discarded and thrown outside the door. Brought it home, scrounged around, found the stand, found the lights, found all the stuff and welcomed us with a tree.

Of course we remember sitting around the advent wreath and lighting candles and praying and singing. One youngster told me of lighting candles year after year hoping for a horse. Oh yes, the horse came but then her hope changed somewhere in the midst of that hoping that the light would not be put out by the darkness. She came to believe it was so.

I asked a student who is a second year student, "Did you go to Lovefeast last night?" "Yes," she said. "What do you do with your candle?" She said, "I kept it. Leaned it up against the wall over my computer so I can look at it from time to time." Now perhaps I am being overly dramatic or run that risk. Her candle would look something like this would it not. Perhaps all of us need yet a second candle. For we are truly broken. We are disfigured unless and until the presence of almighty God comes to us and we need not be afraid. John's gospel makes it very clear. The light came into the world and the darkness could not put it out, but we loved the darkness more than the light because our deeds are evil and we hate the light. But those who are true are not afraid for their deeds to be seen for they know they are of God. It is in that sense then that we have sung new hymns, hymns that talk about crucifixion and death and darkness in order that we embrace the light. Jesus Christ could take unto himself all of the evil, all of the sorrow, all the pain, all the death, all the destruction, all the

disfigurement of ourselves individually and collectively. How do we honor the birth of the stable-born savior but to embrace the darkness in order to receive light. END

Chapel Sermon Spring 1994

ED CHRISTMAN: In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and honey. The people of Jerusalem and all of Judea were going out to him and all the region along the Jordan. They were baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Saducees coming for baptism, he said to them, you brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the wraths to come, bear fruit worthy of repentance? Do not presume to say to yourselves we are Abraham's ancestors. For I tell you that God is able from these very stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in to the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor and will gather the wheat into the granary. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Imagine the loudest, most bizarre clad, awesome looking, heavy metalist you've ever seen, gyrating about the stage. Suddenly he stops and produces a large jar with live frogs in it. He opens the jar and consumes its contents and then reaches over and dips his hand into a large bowl of bee nectar and tries to stuff the whole hand in his mouth at one time. Little wonder that the curious, the good, the law abiding, the cynical, elders and deacons of that day did come out from Jerusalem. For this wild man from across the Jordan has aroused considerable attention and a number of people were seeking to hear what he had to say. It's little wonder that they were put off by his appearance and by his gyrations. Certainly his manners and his title. But they and we were in for yet a greater surprise for we were not prepared to have him point his sticky finger in our faces and say, repent and be baptized. We would huddle together and wonder just what did he mean and what possible connection was this with the prophets of old. But as we huddled together in our uncertainty, we heard him yet again. You snakes. You think you're secure because you're descended from Abraham. God can raise the children of Abraham from the stones on this hillside. There was, I suspect for them and perhaps for us when we hear startling words of judgment, not only a recoiling sense of give me a break, but for some of us some of the time there is an aching uncertainty in

the pit of our stomachs. For just a moment, not a rational moment, mind you but an irrational moment, we would say to such a person such a John the Baptist, what would you have us do. He says well, if you've got two sweaters for Christmas, give one to Goodwill. If you have any control over finances, don't increase the tax assessments. If you've got a job, don't complain about your wages.

You see in the afterglow of Christmas, epiphany brings us a different message. Consider that to make the narrow places wide enough, to make the crooked places straight, requires dramatic change, and for that we, I submit, are not prepared. We prefer the manger scene, but even in those sedate carols is nestled the phrase, the manger in which becomes the mercy seat. That sedate scene and all the hallelujahs are drowned out by the cries of anguish of the parents of Jewish boys who were slaughtered in a desperate attempt to abort the Messiah before he was even born and came to threaten the kingdom.

Remember as we will sing our last hymn that buried in its midst is not just gold and frankincense, gifts that can be used for either good or ill, but one king brings myrrh, an embalming fluid for the dead. Imagine to a child's birthday. There is something strange and new in this message of this Elijah-dressed John the Baptist and the one to follow. The message and the words are harsh and unrelenting. They are disquieting and make us very uncomfortable if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Epiphany is not the time for waking and praying. It is the time for praying and changing. So that even in our irrational moments when we ask what it is that we shall do, the message which comes from John the Baptist is unmistakably clear. Repent. Change your way of living. Else the ax is at the base of the tree and the tree is you and me. We have no heritage that gives us security. Yes, that face, oh that face, and those words. But you see I'm now talking about the person who followed for whom the way was prepared, whose sandals he was not well enough, able enough to carry. I speak of Jesus who picked up the baton from John the Baptist and said, you are an evil generation. Beware of those who wear soft clothes. Did you think that this one who came before me to open the door, to get your attention would be like a reed that blew in the wind easily changed? Not so. He was and I am, Jesus said, unmistakably clearly an either or person. You either repent and change or you're subject to God's judgment.

Snoopy went to school with Charlie Brown and took the true false test. He was the only one to make a hundred. How did he do it? Snoopy says, he didn't tell the teacher but told us. True is true; false is false, and when you're hot, you're hot. Today he suggested that when the people still were suspicious they wanted him to take an essay test. He said, dogs don't take essay tests. Snoopy walked away. But that's not what we can do. We have to try and grasp what the afterglow of a manger become mercy seat means. When I submit we hear those words being a part of evil generation that you and I have

no excuse for being anything else other than to have that wheat thrown in the air and the chaff which is lighter drifts away and the wheat falls and is gathered together. That when we have no excuse, that's too much for us individually to bear. That's why we cling together. We need to hear other people sing and pray. We need to feel other person's sense of vulnerability and pain. That's why we want to study together, eat together and somehow perhaps glean from one another some sense of strength for the daily toil that is set before us, yea, verily for the harsh and unrelenting words of Jesus Christ. The message comes to us together in order that individually we might dare to imagine standing before God almighty having born whatever proof we could bear.

The moment of desperation a student blurts out to another student, I don't think I can stay here any longer. Social pressure to drink is too great. I'm just not sure I can handle it. With those words that student disrobed before his peer or her peer and had to risk the possibility of smug, passive resisting silence or even the curl of the lip that suggests, wait until I suggest so and so what you said. But on this occasion by the grace of almighty God the response was I do know what you understand, what you say. I understand because I'm there too. Somehow from one another we gain some strength so that the bright light of judgment and the gift of mercy and grace come together and we can believe and we can hope. Yes, an evil generation.

I can still see his face. The delightful colleague many years ago. We were sitting with students in a seminar room in Winston Hall and discussing religion. This rabbi was arguing the progressive revelation of God that human beings were getting gradually better and better. I could not believe. How could a Jew argue that the Christians and the people of the twentieth century were better than those of the first. Holocaust then and now, indeed. Would you not agree sisters and brothers that the image of God in all of us is diminished because individually we haven't figured out how collectively we have the strength and the will to say no, to what we should say no to and yes, to what we should say yes to. True is true and false is false and together we could make a difference.

Billy Graham was asked this epiphany season, if you could change one thing, what would it be? He said, I would do away with racism, a manifestation of evil that infects us all. Epiphany is the season also when we acknowledge the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr. He came from a family of preachers, not from across the Jordan. He was not bizarre in appearance but oh was his message heart-rending and bizarre. It said to a violent world, be at peace. He said to racial hatred, be no more. He said I have a dream and I have a vision and that vision I submit to you was empowered by almighty God. He was a messenger compelled beyond his own strength to speak words that were foolishness to us all. Foolishness. When he like the Baptists became too human to be tolerated, too much of a threat to the structure, both of course were killed. A colleague at

Wake Forest was confused as we watched together the memorial service. Why all these, why all these prayers? What are all these Christians doing here? I said well, my friend because they are there because Martin Luther King was a Christian and he is now a martyr. So the university did something really bizarre and strange for a university faculty, took away one of its own days to teach. Instead next Monday is a holiday, no classes. One faculty member confronted by that fact and a bit weary of speechmaking said, why don't we set it aside to do things together, faculty and students, in the spirit of Dr. King's effort to say the world can be changed. We know what the cynics will say. They already have about any such symbolic gesture. But imagine if on Sunday night enough students gather at Brendle that after an alumnus speaks about her own experience we walk over to the quad and there are enough candles lit to circle the entire quad as we sing. Imagine the students will fill out these sheets and those at the food court. By five o'clock this afternoon the kingdom of God is here, not sometime later to say yes, I'll go help out with some project. I want to give a piece of time on Monday. I want to remember and honor and to celebrate one who came before who could not carry Jesus' sandals but certainly was in tune with Jesus' message to repent and to believe the gospel. Let us heed the message of almighty God together. [static] END

Chapel Sermon 4/28/ 94

ED CHRISTMAN: Thank you for coming. Thank you especially for those who have steadfastly blocked out this time during this year. I trust that God has blessed you and will bless you yet even this day. The way to the resurrection is through the cross. At the foot of the cross, gaze upon agony's face. At the foot of the cross hear the pain. At the foot of the cross lay down the burden of sin, not the sins, but the burden of sin and death and pick up life anew. The crucifixion is the door to resurrection without the suffering, without the pain, without the death. There is no () and there is no hope, and there is no life everlasting. There is no resurrection.

Jesus appeared to Paul. Paul was always, it would seem under control, focused upon protecting a tradition and a religion which had been God's people. But his reason had turned to rage because he saw in the followers of the Nazarene an unacceptable interpretation of who and how the Messiah would become the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. He determined to persecute and to destroy those who would otherwise, he believed, destroy his very life. But something happened, and from the illusion of life that he had embraced blinded and on the ground he heard a voice and the light spoke to him. From that prostrate position on the ground, he walked the face of the earth, not as Saul the persecutor, but as Paul the proclaimer of Jesus Christ. He laid down even the burden of having persecuted Christ to being Christ's chief exponent. He was able to pick up his life. He was a Jew. He was a Roman, a blunt, educated, well placed, a man of reason and style and

substance, and he said of it after this event on the Damascus Road, it is all garbage for me to live. It is Christ and to die his death.

But if Paul was the man of control and focus and clarity and substance based upon reason and faith, then what had been. Jesus would also appear to a person who was out of control, vigorous, probably illiterate, a person so strong of mind and so impulsive of heart and will that one would not, as we might say in colloquial terms, mess with him on the playground. Peter was not focused at all. [break] He believed everything. He did everything. He always led with his mouth. Occasionally he would say things like you are the Lord. You are the Christ, the son of the living God and immediately not understand what he said. Get behind me Satan. You do not know what you have said. This strong-willed person who could have well defended himself against several of the Roman guards wimped out before the fire, cursed the very life of Jesus () though the accent of his denial betrayed him yet again.

So at that unforgettable breakfast the betrayer is told feed the sheep. But Jesus observed something else, and these cryptic words which Kim has read near the end of John's gospel. Jesus observed that though he had spoken to this man and given him resurrection life yet again, he is looking around, checking people out, comparing himself with John. Oh looks like he's on his last legs. The tradition says those feeble last legs of John out distanced Peter to the tomb. No matter. Jesus said, does it matter to you whether he lives or dies. Are you going to continue and persist in judging yourself by others and their faith or lack of it, their help [health?] or their illness, their brokenness, their wholeness. Peter, I said, follow me. So the resurrection door is cracked open. It doesn't stand full ajar until this same impulsive, volcanic person is without lunch, very hot on top of the house, sees what to others would have been a nightmare, becomes a vision and God's message is for Gentile and for Jew. Yes, Peter, if you're hungry you can eat any kind of food that you like. For I say to you, Peter, it is clean. So his vision and the vision of Cornelius come together, and he says, I perceive that God loves all people and offers them all resurrection and new life, and this impulsive, often misguided, lack of courage fisherman becomes rock.

Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. It's obvious from her name she's a woman, and therefore in that day and time a second class person, but Mary Magdalene is less than second class. She is afflicted. Now those of us who are compelled to live our lives in the midst of sin and seem to revel in being immersed in it would like to believe that the seven demons are the seven deadly sins. Who among us men would want some woman to have all of them to herself? No, it's in all probability true that these seven only represents the intensity of her affliction which was physical and not based upon her sin. This is a person who knew alienation and distance from others for a very long time. You know how we shy away from people in wheelchairs or who look funny or walk funny who have epileptic seizures, whom we know are ill. The discomfort is a

reminder of God's broken world, and we just as soon be associated with any kind of affliction, especially if it is severe. She knows no company. She is not respected. Yet it is to this person that God through Christ says, the Lord is risen. So she had been delivered of her demons, and she had followed Jesus through the healings and the teachings to the foot of the cross and thence to the empty tomb. Uncontrollably weeping when she finds the body not there. Who are you looking for? If you have taken him someplace, she says, you tell me I will go and get him. () but he spoke to her and he said, do not touch me Mary Magdalene. Follow me. Begin your following by going and telling the brothers what you have seen and what you have heard, and she went and told them, I have seen the Lord.

Who among us has not known the level ground of the cross. Family disruption, illness and pain, broken relationships, our own burden of sin, which confounds us, our loneliness, our fear. Who has not known what it is to be living as if you can self-help yourself into salvation? Have we not all been there in one form or another? Do we not tend to abide often in the suffering and the pain so that we cannot see anything but the darkness that imprisons us in death? But somehow, in some ways Jesus appears. Jesus appeared to a Russian composer named Rimsky-Korsakov. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote the Easter Russian Oratorio, and he includes the pain and the sorrow of death in order that he can compose music that sounds like a thousand birds singing. He said of his work, this is like a bright and shining day. It is almost carnival like, the depth of the joy of Easter Sunday.

Some have said in fact as recently as Sunday, Jean and I were at Kim's house and the person who was in school with us said, Well, what have you been doing since retirement? Retirement from what? Retirement for what? I didn't say it quite that () but almost. I could have said to this understandable question, no, I can't retire. You see once a year I sit with a very special place, and I see candles lit and I hear, "Joy to the World the Lord is Come". I always remember that one picture that someone gave to us of a parent holding a child holding a lighted candle wrapped in crucifixion paper. God comes to us in so many ways inviting us to the resurrection. He comes in the listening of music in the dark on a Saturday night in a residence hall rooms when Keith Levi said, I was changed. Resurrection came to him though it had been hanging around for long. In the asking of the questions for which there are no answers, asking them as faithfully as Job and Kevin Taylor asked them. In so doing the resurrection may come.

Resurrection did not come to me in some dramatic overpowering Damascus Road experience. But it did come, not at the time of baptism or rededication as a student at the Wake Forest Baptist Church. It came forty-one years ago this month when we had invited a Scotsman preacher to lead us in a revival. All he wanted us to do is keep on singing, "There's a light upon the mountain, the day is at the spring, our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of our King." I was less than

month from graduating from law school and was all clearly planned [break] reasoned out [break] been married for four months. Forget it. She had to trust that something happened that week I could not explain, but I could not deny. Resurrection comes to all kinds of people in all kinds of settings. Those who are reasonable and very talented lay aside their self-sufficiency as did Paul. When it comes to the poor and the less talented whose hearts want to be in the right place and will speak and do what apostles do and will come to the afflicted. And those who have no credibility in society, but that they say I have seen the Lord and Mary Magdalene rolled the stone away. Paul found a way to save it. Have this (), which was in Christ Jesus as being in the form of God did not count in quality with God something to hold onto. () taking the form of the person, a human being born in the likeness of men being a servant unto death even the death at the cross. For this reason God exalted him, lifted him up, gave him a name above every name. At the name of Jesus every man should bow, every tongue confess, Jesus Christ is Lord. END

Chapel Sermon 9/1/94

ED CHRISTMAN: The prophet Joel declares, speaking of God I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy and your old men shall bring dreams and your young men shall see visions. Even the male and female slaves in those days upon them I will pour out my spirit. Joel's words are an echo of the creation story in which God declares, I will breathe into you the life everlasting. At least that was the intention. But as you understand and recall the story does become skewed by our human sinfulness. Somehow God's promise of life, God's promise of presence was more than we could imagine, more than we were willing to accept and we took a different path. But God persisted in pouring out his spirit on all flesh, calling upon you and me to dream dreams and to have visions. Now what really does it mean to dream dreams and to have visions, to be the recipient of God's spirit, to be made in the image of God.

Once upon a time a young man came to Wake Forest College in Wake Forest, North Carolina from the town of Whiteville, North Carolina, a small place in the eastern part of the state. Now he is the poet in residence at Cornell University. Next spring he will pay us a lengthy visit for which we will be very grateful, but the news about his coming will no doubt not include something I'm going to tell you about Archie Ammons. Archie Ammons is a pool shark. I know that because having found out that he enjoyed playing I invited him and two of my friends to the basement where we were allegedly going to play pool. Actually we watched Archie Ammons shoot pool. To the wonderment still of the physics professor that was there, that announced cushion shot with the eight and the nine ball is still not possible. He said, I believe I could have made a living doing this. He has made a living with words. He has made a living seeking to understand at least as one of his inferred

goals, I will submit, what it means to be made in the image of God. From a poem entitled, "Hymn", H-Y-M-N, are these words. "If I am going to find you, I must leave the earth of beyond the wet marsh, the hills, the craters, the glaciers. I must leave it all and go to where it is dark and still, unseasonable, undifferentiated, stark, empty. For you are partially and entirely everywhere. You're inside and outside all things.

Archie Ammons is trying to capture in words something we find very difficult to grasp and that is our connection with God. For we know ourselves do we not as feeble and uncertain and full of fear and unwilling to wait on anything. But Archie Ammons suggests that God persists in understanding and is prepared to keep on coming to us in a variety of ways that we could hear and see and feel the presence of the Lord. Holy, majestic and mysterious, this God whom we would seek to know and who has given us the breath of life.

As a child I grew up with the radio. That meant I listened to "Let's Pretend" at eleven o'clock every Saturday morning. To soap operas like "Portia Faces Life". "The Lone Ranger". But one of my favorites was entitled, "I Love a Mystery". One of the reasons I enjoyed this programs is precisely the same, I submit, as why most of us like programs that have deadlines whether it's on radio or television for we want a mystery solved before the last commercial. That is our nature, so it seems. But as a youngster in addition to enjoying the radio I had another mysterious kind of experience which was not pleasant. It was lying awake thinking about what it means to believe that we will live with God in the kingdom forever and ever, world without end, everlasting life. Timeless, I could not comprehend. I was afraid and in some sense I still am. What does that mean? How can I comprehend it? The answer of course is that I cannot if I limit myself and fail to dream dreams and to have visions and to imagine that God's universe is beyond our computers and our calculations. God's universe and God's strength and power is beyond that of a meteorite hitting Jupiter. God is as near as the breath that we breathe, sustaining, strengthening and lifting us up.

So the psalmist speaks of how God knows us and our words and our thoughts even before they are formed. God's thoughts, the psalmist says, are more weighty or more awesome and numerous that I can count. They are more numerous than the sand of the sea. But the psalmist then says, yet I am still here. Something inside dissuades the psalmist, and I hope the rest of us, from giving up on the majesty and the power and the mystery of God, rather let us celebrate. Let us look up into the hills and say unto the hills I seek my help. From whence does it come? Is that because they are so still and so large and so powerful or that if we know anything about the Appalachian range, the oldest range of mountains in North America and try to imagine how long they have been there. In their solemnity do they somehow connect us with the presence of God. Or is it when I stand at the beach looking out at the ocean and I am standing under a pier. I am looking out seeing the waves

cascading against the supports of that pier as they come rolling in as if I'm in some kind of natural cathedral of sight and sound. Is it on the quad sometimes very, very late at night, very early in the morning when it is very, very still that somehow I know there is more to life than life and death. There is more than my watch. There is more than time. There is something called everlasting life and is that why we gather for worship to reach back, to remember in order to hope, to sing, to pray, to our have our spirit stirred so that somehow we would know there is a spirit in us that comes from elsewhere.

Paul had to frame away to speak to the Philippians, a church filled with people like us who squabble over incidental things and the differences of our beliefs. He said, what can I say to them that brings them to the focus of the one single root upon which we all come and to which we all return for nourishment. Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus. Being in the form of God did not count equality with God something to be held onto. But emptied himself, taking the form of a man, becoming a human being found in such a likeness he was obedient unto God even unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God raised him up and gave him a name above every name that at the name Jesus every knee should bow, every tongue confess Jesus is Lord. Paul was not answering a theological confession. He was not simply using an ancient hymn framework in a text designed to edify Paul. He was seeking to say no matter what happens, what joy or sorrow you experience when you come together to worship, he said Philippians, and he, I submit, says to us, when you come to worship, remember how it is that you are connected with God, with the unseasonable and the undifferentiated. You are connected to the almighty through Jesus Christ who divested himself and became as one of us. Jesus' divestment is our investment. Jesus' one single deed overcomes all past and future good deeds upon which we often so tragically rely. We will simply do enough good deeds and God will bless us. The Bible makes it very clear that our efforts to reach God are insignificant and often wrong-headed and wrong-hearted. It is God persistently coming to us from beyond.

Sunday School last Sunday we were talking about God's grace. One member of the class in seeking to explain what she felt like grace meant said, and this is almost a quote, grace means that God will love and redeem someone who has been a sleaze ball all their lives. On the last day of their earthly existence God can claim them through the presence of Jesus Christ. I said being encouraged by her willingness to say sleaze ball I used one of my favorite phrases to describe us all. In other words we're all pond scum but for the grace of God. For those of us who have not done many bad deeds and are not sleaze balls and who live accordingly as best we can, it is important to revisit the tree from which we come to be reminded that our deeds are acts of gratitude for what God in Christ has already done for us. So to the Philippians and to us we are reminded that this one deed is for all deeds. This one act of obedience covers all our disobedience. This one death provides life, yes, life everlasting for those who heed the voice of the almighty. Through that means Christ was lifted up.

Nicodemus wanted to understand what that meant. He'd been searching. He'd been looking. Somehow there stirred in him the sense of God's presence and God's power. He wanted to understand whether or not this newest potential Messiah, this carpenter from Nazareth was the one, and naturally like you and me, Nicodemus was impressed with the signs and the miracles which proves to be his undoing almost. He's really coming to check this person out. Are you the one really? But Jesus as God understood and knew his thoughts before he spoke them, you must be born from above. Now the scripture often says you must be born again, and so Nicodemus attempts to pass his theological test, his religious test with some very simple biology and he fails. This is not a biological question, Jesus said. I said, you must be born from above, from elsewhere, from beyond where you do not know and comprehend and what you cannot possibly deserve. Nicodemus is stunned and shattered and left in disbelief, but like the psalmist overwhelmed yet I am still here, Nicodemus said, and he followed the process of Jesus unfolding his life and ministry. Somehow he had gained by the pouring out of the spirit upon him enough courage to say to his peers, the least we can do is give him a fair trial. Their response and ridicule suggested perhaps we might have two trials. Then Nicodemus proceeded to follow the pathway to Calvary and to that tragic, bloody day. He helped carry the corpse of Jesus to the tomb. Now what happens after that? We always, don't we, want to have a final segment of Nicodemus joined up with some of the others. Maybe he even met Paul. Who knows later on and he formed a church or he was an elder or a deacon in a church and he continued to sing God's praises. The bible is not interested in the consequences but in the encounter that Nicodemus and you and I have with almighty God. Gratitude will work itself out if it's there.

Well, we don't know about Nicodemus. We don't know about us do we? Are we prepared with the Philippians to hear that Christ was obedient even unto death, the death of the cross. Are we prepared to respond to that, to gain its strength, to be renewed by what Christ has done for us. Are we prepared to acknowledge how difficult that is?

Yesterday I went by the meditation room on the fourth floor of Benson to look at the prayers that had been left in the basket, and they were meaningful prayers about a whole host of things, many very personal. One of them said, I am struggling with my faith and I know that I am very far from God. My stamina is spent. Written at the bottom of that prayer was a response. God will respond. God understands. God knows your struggle. It is in knowing that God knows our struggle and that in Christ the power has come to give us an alternative to our fear, to our apprehension that we can hear Jesus saying, peace be with you. Jesus breathed upon his disciples the Holy Spirit, and actually said, you can forgive sins or you can retain them. That is you can forgive others of how they have treated you. But alas if you do not, you retain them. They become part of your very existence. That is an incredibly, powerfully difficult, necessary thing for us to try to do as an act of

gratitude. For the spirit of God is poured out upon old and young, all of us to deliver us from our slavery to ourselves and our predisposition to control our lives and to answer all mysteries rather to be free to embrace the mystery that is found in God, that is found in Jesus Christ. So whether we are in the first century or near the end of the twentieth, we know the unsearchable, always present spirit that will not desert us no matter what. Beyond our calculations then, beyond our computers, beyond our fears of all that surrounds us. Shall we not hear the voice of God calling us to hear and to believe that God in Christ nurtures and sustains us each and everyone at whatever point we are in our sojourn. Do not be afraid. The peace of God be with you. Hallelujah, amen. END

Chapel Sermon 10/27/94

ED CHRISTMAN: Before anything else let me say that last night Jean and I received phone calls from both daughters. It occurred to me that I'm never quite thankful enough God's gifts to us far beyond our virtue. For indeed for what is now becoming long enough time that I will exaggerate it on the far end, I might not say forty years. I might say fifty. For a very long time it has been my privilege to be here, and to you and those who have preceded you, I say thank you. The bible says, do not worry about your grades. Forget this nonsense about getting a good job so that you can pay off your college loans. Forget about being a drum major for righteousness to right the wrongs in our world. Cease and desist from making friends that you expect to carry with you and nourish you the rest of your life. All of that is vanity, striving out to win. It is nothing, so says the bible in the book of Ecclesiastes, and furthermore this teacher, philosopher, whomever he was with the interesting name Qoheleth, said, I have tried wisdom and I will tell you that there is no figuring out of God's pattern or plan. So give that up too because there is no difference between the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish, the good and the evil, no difference at all. Indeed there is no difference between human beings and animals, came from the dust. To the dust they shall return.

Those mysteries that people in universities and in churches and elsewhere struggle with throughout their lives. Forget it. Young people die. Elderly people linger much too long for themselves and their loved ones. Cancer is totally democratic. So as I've heard recently a phrase at cardiac class when one of my colleagues was teasing the young woman who is in charge, she just said save it. Forget it. Do whatever it is that God is giving you to do and that's it. Now in the midst of all of these wonderfully power of positive thinking affirmation in Ecclesiastes, and I'm sure you will take to heart because it comes from the bible. Qoheleth does say one other thing. Be moderate in all things. As Lee has read and in other parts of the book it really says, don't take any chances. Chill out. Be cool. Calculate, evaluate, speculate, pontificate, negotiate,

conciliate. I don't even think that's a word. Be moderate in all things and consistent. Qoheleth could have then said disintegrate. Just go to the dust.

Now in the midst of all that I'm sure you'd like to find something you'd like in this because if the bible is to speak to us, sisters and brothers, doesn't it have to have something in it that we feel good about. Of the making of books, there is no end and much study is the wearisomeness of the pleasure. I'm sorry that's all that Qoheleth has to say because right at the end of this book which may or may not have made it had someone had the genius to say, well, Solomon wrote it. There's no evidence that Solomon wrote it, but Solomon's name was big in those times. So right at the end mysteriously or not so mysteriously this cynical realist who has told it like it is about the just and the unjust, the rich and the poor, he says fear God and obey God's commandments for God will judge every one of your deeds for good and ill, ill including those which are hidden from everyone else's sight. How does that fit in? Well, of course it doesn't. But there are the commandments as to how we are supposed to live, but that doesn't sound too much like moderation. It does remind us of course this moderation principle of that wonderful story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. One bowl of porridge was too hot. One bowl of porridge was too cold. Baby Bear's bowl was [pause]—

CONGREGATION: Just right.

EC: The book of Revelations said and those of you who are just right lukewarm, you're from a place called Laodicea, which some years ago Chaplain Fouche reminded us was a city very much like Winston-Salem. Those of you who are lukewarm will be spewed out of God's mouth. Hallelujah. Jesus said, maybe Baby Bear's bowl of porridge is for Baby Bear. You're not a Baby Bear, sister and brother. You're young person or an older person called to a different commandment. So Lord what is the commandment? You shall love the lord your God with all of your heart and all of your soul and all of your mind and all of your strength and your neighbor as yourself. Not moderation. Not calculation. Not self-interest. No protection of the person in the interest of following Jesus Christ. None. Let us be specific. Jesus said foxes have holes where the birds of the air have nests. But the son of man, nowhere to lay his head. Now that's why I want you to follow me so you understand the gift of life and live it to the full obedient unto death even the death on the cross if necessary. Then Jesus got terribly personal because we can sort of manage the birds and the foxes, but when Jesus said hate your mother and father, even the cynic Qoheleth would say that's not a very good idea. They're paying the bills. Besides I don't have a job yet. Hate your mother and father. Cleave unto me. Now we just sort of take that passage and lay it aside. Jesus is trying to say if you're going to love God, you will have to make some decisions that are not customary to be made in a secular world in which we form alliances with our families, our tribes, our friends and find support and comfort. We give a little and we

receive a little and there's a bond there which supports us and gives us strength in a time of need. Jesus is not anti-family. Jesus is not anti-friends. He is saying get your priorities straight. Of course there will be friends. Of course there is family to honor. But first from whence did your life come? Did it come from your family? Did it come from your friends? It came from God. The greatest commandment is to love God with all that you are.

We had a dean here a few years ago, and the scene in his office is of a person who has been kicked out of school and is now applying for readmission. Dean Dyer said, I'm going to let you back in school. But I want you to give your heart to God; your mind to the books because the rest of you belongs to me and I will place kick you right out of here if you don't obey the laws. Now not all of Bob Dyer's encounters were that successful because, you see, the fear of God had been instilled in this person, and he did just that. I don't know how much praying he did, but he certainly did a lot of studying and kept himself out of trouble.

When I have a wedding, there are different things that I may say, but there is one thing that I always say. Henceforth all of your relationships are determined by a new purpose to discover the ordinary and extraordinary events of life together. All relationships with family, friends and strangers are interpreted in the light of this new purpose. I should hardly think that you have to get married to hear that. I think that what Jesus has told us is crystal clear. That's why we have to worship regularly. That's why we have to pray regularly because sisters and brothers we do not do that, do we. So the first thing we do is ask God for forgiveness for our moderation, and we ask God for the strength to do that for which we ought to do. Luke tries to make the point because there is that tag line in there. You love God and your neighbor as yourself. Curiously enough the only way to love yourself, to hope for yourself, to care for yourself is to give yourself to the hoping and caring for others. So he tells the story of the Good Samaritan, and because Qoheleth is to be taken seriously the writer of Ecclesiastes would say, well, that's a great story, but only one out of three believed it. Only one of the three persons presented with an opportunity to love God and neighbor as self was willing to take the risk. But Jesus said nevertheless if you will do that, if you will show mercy, you will live. Then Qoheleth would say and of course if we're going to go into this new approach that you are making in the New Testament with this Messiah who offers resurrection and eternal life, then I would remind you he said if you will do these things and be this way and love God altogether you will live and the consequence is that if you do not, you will die. Seize the day, sisters and brothers.

In that movie, *Dead Poet's Society*, what did it take for them to seize the day? It took a charismatic teacher who loved them and hoped for them and pushed them as hard as he could. It took the death of one of their own. Then they stood on the desks. Then they ran the risk of being expelled. Then they ran the risk of following a path they knew not the

extent or depth or shape of. That's when they did that. The psalmist says to us, rejoice this is the day which the Lord has made. Seize it. God will show you what to do and what to be. Seize it and you shall live. END

Chapel Sermon 1/19/95

ED CHRISTMAN: Paul was between a rock and a hard place. He had spent all the money he had made making tents. He had spent his energies traveling in Greece and Turkey. He had written letters to help deal with the problems and controversy among the early Christians. He had planted and watered small but satisfying congregations. He knew they were of his creation through the power of the Holy Spirit. He also knew of the generosity and hospitality these who had taken him in and made him a part of their lives, such as at Philippi where he was particularly loved. But he says in the passage, which Chris has read, that his work there is done. So he has not only spent but he believed his past was spent, and he has a new vision. Before that vision can become a reality he has one more joyful and somewhat painful task. He must take the money, which has been collected. In other words they have heeded his warning. Jewish Christians in Jerusalem are suffering. Gentile Christians, you know them only in the faith and with them you do not always agree nor they with you. Nevertheless you have collected this money. I will take it to them and hope that their pride is not such as to refuse it in their need. But he knows with some apprehension. Indeed well he might for he was arrested and imprisoned while there. So he does come to Rome, but not to visit his fellow believers, but to be imprisoned and to be marked. So what comes of his vision about Rome and about Spain? Indeed in the power of God's gifts of hospitality and those who have received God's gifts of love, people didn't go to Spain. They went to Barcelona where my mother was born. They came and sprinkled North Carolina where my father was born and to countless other places where you and your kin heard the message of the good news so that the message was spread abroad. The vision was in that sense fulfilled.

Indeed in terms of the history of this very school, imagine if you will dark [nights?] and knocking at the door, total strangers by Sam and Sara Wait who were collecting nickels and dimes in North Carolina to raise money to found a school in the name of almighty God. They were often taken in and given a place to bed down for the night. On one occasion when their daughter was sick, a family who knew them not, must have known the scripture which says you are to welcome strangers and make them feel at home. Yes, we'll keep your daughter while you then continue on your way. On another occasion they were received but no supper was forthcoming. In their joy for having a place to sleep and rest they began to sing and as the future first president of Wake Forest said, we began to sing and suddenly we heard pots and pans rattling. Either they were reminded of a greater hospitality or they didn't care for our singing. Nevertheless they were fed as all of us

have been fed, as all of us have been guests and strangers. Now from whence does this model of hosting come from? It comes from Jesus. Early in his ministry two or three sought him and knew that he was somehow mystically strange and different and wanted to know more about him and they said where are you staying? He said, come and see, which was a bit more than an invitation to a simple meal at some person's home. Come and see, and he began to work his will. Then there were five thousand on the hillside. Then there were twelve, and it was very quiet. For they realized that the host had become the guest because he had put himself at their disposal, and if they took him into themselves, they then were to be hosts for others. He made a covenant with them so (). So did he. Then that next episode of hosting was beside the Sea of Galilee according to John's gospel. There now are only eleven. There was fish frying, and it was very quiet for they knew who he was, but they did not say a word. As a gracious host so that the awkwardness would not overcome them, Jesus said to Peter, do you love me? Yes, Lord. Feed my sheep. Become the host for others. Give them of the nourishment that you have received for me. Create for them a place and a space that is safe for them no matter what their beliefs or doubts, no matter what their circumstance. Feed my sheep. Be hosts to strangers.

During Christmas we all gathered at the younger daughter's house. Kim and Stan live about fifty miles from here at a place called Stoneville. After the service that morning and dinner and presents, Kim's sister Carolyn and I walked outside. Something that's always recommended after a Christmas dinner is a short or yet a longer walk. We wound up sitting on a swing behind the sanctuary. Carolyn, I said, this is the place where your sister and her husband sat while the congregation inside decided their future. I said I always liked that. Carolyn added to what I had thought about it previously by saying, this is a safe place. Safe place. The strength of God () would have us believe that if we give and receive gifts, if we hear Jesus' message, we feel safe to be who we are and to explore the riches of almighty God.

Next week in this place the Prodigals Community will give testimony to what it is to be a part of a safe place, to what it is to find strength from others and to be nourished when your strength has been spent. It's not always easy. In fact giving and receiving hospitality is difficult. Former President Carter's mother at sixty-seven decided to take her trained nurse skills to India and work with the Peace Corps. We recounted this week part of what she wrote about that first experience giving her first injection to a leprosy child. I did not look at her she said. I left the room as quickly as I could and went to another place and scrubbed myself until my skin was raw and red. I fear that I might get a disease. Little by little I began to feel more at ease with her and with them so that I could finally look into their faces. Then he concluded by saying a mother writes that one day impulsively without thinking about anything, she kissed the child on the mouth who had leprosy. Would we do that

if it were not as a fact hospitality? Would a child who knows nothing but pain and suffering and feels alien receive it but for God's gift of hospitality?

Some students at Wake Forest had just returned from Calcutta where they worked in the hospice environment of Mother Theresa dealing primarily with people who are soon to die. One of the students said, I was afraid of getting a disease. I didn't know how to help them, and they had to help me find out how to help them. () language barriers, but little by little in a relatively short time I became at ease in what, to use my words, became a safe place. The priest had told her, you're not going to contract any diseases. God has sent you. God will protect you. Giving and receiving hospitality for those who need it and for those who can receive it.

This is a place of hospitality and one of your number who deserves to remain anonymous started asking me about this and I said, why don't you wait? She persisted and I said, why don't you wait? She said, well, I'm just impatient. () Why isn't the chaplain wearing the stole that was purchased in Jerusalem this past fall? What's that got to do with hospitality? See in this very place the person who gave me the stole for preaching and for weddings was to have been married in this place, but the spouse, the intended spouse, didn't show up. In her grieving and in her coming to terms with that reality she is prepared to affirm preaching and weddings and all kinds of events and give to me a gift, a bittersweet gift to be sure, but a gift nonetheless. This room is filled with testimonies of twenty-five years of preaching and singing and beautiful music and lovingly crafted stained glass windows, () dedications, memorial services and weddings and private prayer by persons who come in the middle of the night, piano, organ, solitude. You come with a friend, but when there is a need, as there always is and certainly in this season of social swirl, for quietness and for reflection.

So what have you done lately for someone else? Do you know how hard it would be for the people from Calcutta and Venice and Rome, Venice and London to come and try to explain to you what it was like to have ()? They will be profoundly frustrated and even more so if you turn your eyes away. But if you listen and let them try to share, they will give you gifts. You will give them a gift by listening. Is there someone who you should invite to chapel? Is there someone you should invite to church or to your room? Did you welcome the new student and the old roommate. Should you realize that in this place as in other places there is the presence of hospitality, of openness and a sense of what is safe and secure from all ()?

The star among countless stars, how did they know those astrologers of yesteryear, which one to follow. Surely they must have had some discussions as they wondered their way toward Bethlehem. Somehow they managed to know there

was one star different from all the rest. Something serene and sublime and mysterious and majestic and powerful, an all-inclusive star. ().

So whether it is the stole or a star or a stained glass window or simply () place or the openness of you mind and heart, you don't have to go too far to be guests, to be stranger, to be host. It can be as simple a thing as happened to me during Christmas. One of our neighborhood traditions is let you share goodies with one another. The goody I like to share is fudge. So Jean has beautifully put them on the plate, every square is well crafted, wrapped in Saran Wrap™, into the bottom of a grocery sack. Off to the neighbor's house. So I put down the sack and I ring the bell. Then I reach for the plate of fudge, and as I lift it up, the Saran Wrap™ didn't hold on one side and all the fudge is in the bottom of the sack. The neighbor comes out and is standing there as I'm frantically taking the fudge () on the plate. [laughter] It doesn't look the way Jean prepared it. What can I say to my neighbor? Well, you know it is a clean brown paper bag. She accepted it. If she had somehow said but () just don't tell anybody. Then she said in her act of gracious hosthood, well, shall I take this plate I have from you and mess it up before I give it to you? No. That won't be necessary. You've already been very gracious. Very gracious. You have been a host to a person who is suddenly not your neighbor but a very awkward stranger.

Paul never got to Rome. The message did. In all probability this was his last letter and one judged to me the most profoundly complete theological statement he ever made. It deals with the question of the Jews and the Gentiles and their different understandings of what the gospel was. So he was able to say what he had said elsewhere for me to live as Christ () was his last will and testament which can be yours and my first will and testament to show for God's love for us and the gratitude. God has given us by the way we listen to his love and hope for one another. Jesus comes, surprise our (). What we would not get imagine the best that you have to give. Let us find your secret riches. Taste love, believe and live. Come Lord Jesus our host and guest to be, bless our friends and family and strangers wherever they be. Amen. END

Chapel Sermon 4/27/95

ED CHRISTMAN: Happy New Year. No, I have not been out in the sun too long. I know about that ritual in which all of us have participated, horns, balloons, hoorahs and spirits of all kinds. I know about that crowd of thousands that gathers in Times Square and this giant ball that comes down and the huge roar that goes up. Sisters and brothers, it all pales in comparison to the flames that rose from that small fire beside the Sea of Galilee on the resurrection morning. Jesus on his haunches. The disciples not sure what to say or what to do. That's why he was there so they would feel and think and know what they ought to do. Oh yes, I know about Happy New Years and those futile, feeble resolutions we all have made even

the resolution that says I resolve not to make any resolutions. Jesus resolved to put the question and the command in such a way that there was a chance that these days could be the first days of a new year. Happy New Year.

The person he chose to speak to and I choose to believe that the other disciples were within earshot was our look alike, Simon Peter. What did you say chaplain, look alike? I've got no beard. I don't smell of fish. I'm not as muscular as those who have to pull those ropes to bring the fish in. I'm certainly more literate than he. Let's get beyond the measures by which we usually measure one another, how we smell, how we look, how many muscles we have and how literate we are. We are Peter's look alike if we have ever turned our back on Jesus Christ. If we've ever seen a way to be cool and be a Christian at the same time. If we have calculated how to respond to family and friends when we somehow know that the conflict is between believing and following Christ and doing what is more natural or will not get us into trouble or causes us to take no risks at all. Peter turned his back on his Lord. In fear he struck a person with his sword. In faith it was possible Jesus to mend the wound. Peter's wound was deep. It was not just that he was violent as we are in our speech and in our deeds. He cursed the name of the Lord. No, I do not know him before yet another (). You talk like him. You're like the Nazarene. You're from Galilee. He cursed the name. Yes, he denied his Lord. Simon do you love me? Jesus knew all of that about swords and about denial. He forgave Peter that Peter might be able to forgive any person who had wronged him or would wrong him. He forgave Peter that he would not longer operate out of fear and use swords but out of faith and use the word of God and stand where he had to stand and as Howard Cossell said, tell it like it is. Do you love me? Yes, Lord you know I love you. Then feed my sheep. Tend to my lambs.

Perhaps in the words of the hymn, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in his wonderful face. The things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." Peter got the message. So did the other disciples. So did anonymous millions of others who for twenty centuries have sought to understand what it means to feed the sheep because they have been fed by almighty God. Lapsed of course, Christians killing other Christians. Christians killing other people. Finding ways to hide from the face of God. Calculate our responses and to pile up our works so that somehow in desperation we'll believe that Christ will give us our just reward.

What did Peter do with his newfound freedom of faith and not fear fed by the Lord? What did he do? Well, here's the Pentecost banner inspired by one of the windows over here. Now those of you who are in the liturgical tradition can appreciate I hope that the academic calendar and the church calendar do not coincide. We are not at Pentecost in the church year, but we need to be at Pentecost this morning. We need to understand that when Peter was fed and got over his own burden of guilt and sin, he was able to stand and preach. Tongues of fire were there and all kinds of people, all shapes

and sizes, bearded and non-bearded, muscular and non-muscular, literate and illiterate sensed the presence of God. The church began with Peter and Paul, Priscilla and Aquilla, anonymous millions of others who most assuredly, most assuredly lapsed from time to time only to hear the question once again and for Peter it was seeing that scene of Jesus on his haunches asking, Simon, do you love me. Yes, Lord. Well, take another crack at it. So he and John are present with a person who is sick unto body is healed. He is in the Sanhedrin when he is told, you have been warned not to preach this gospel all about this Nazarene. Peter said for them all cannot respond to the laws of man. We must obey the law of almighty God. Whatever the reason. But for me his incredible risk came when responding to what was a dream or a nightmare, he went to the home of a hated Roman soldier, a Gentile no less, and they ate together and Peter said, God is no respecter of person. Everyone is welcome to the table. Everyone is welcome if they come seeking God's genuine blessing of forgiveness. Now what about us? Yes, we turn our backs, but when we turn and face the face of Christ, what are we to do. The simplest part of the answer is that we forgive others because we have been forgiven. We have been fed forgiveness. We feed it to others. You and I do not need to go to school any longer to know how to do that. That is not as they say rocket science. It's common sense. It's what you feel and what you know you ought to do and how you ought to be. You pray for others especially those that you know don't deserve it by any standard. Pray for others.

In the Benson meditation center I scooped up the little pieces of paper that have prayers on them for the past several days. They were frightening and scary. They were poignant and powerful. What really makes them most powerful of all is that when a person has said I need help in very strong language, other people have dated their response. They haven't put their names. They are among the anonymous Christians. They just said what day it was that they read that and they prayed for that unknown person. They prayed for others.

We get a call regularly from a friend who is an adult in many ways and a child in many others. There was a call this week. Her call often involves the same kind of prayers I read in Benson, very specific about herself, her family, people in her church and others. So the litany included all of those. Then she said, we have to pray for the parents of those babies killed, those children killed in Oklahoma. And she said, we have to pray for the man who killed them. Wow. Feed as we have been fed. If we are to hear God's word as feeding and nourishing us, we have to ponder questions and the circumstances we cannot answer.

Last week standing in line waiting for the procession to move into the chapel for our celebration, a colleague had said to me, I need to ask you Chaplain about a couple of parables that bother me. Dear Lord his only bothered by two of the parables. He said, there's this parable about the people out working all day and then these people showed up late one day

and they got the same wage. I wrote him this week. Dear colleague, this is not a parable about money. It's not a parable about work. Please note that throughout the parable it says at every point when the manager of the vineyard said will you come and work, the people said yes. They could come. They were prepared to work. They were not afraid to work. They were not in that sense afraid to hear God call them and be blessed by being called and to receive the blessing of almighty God. I said this is a prayer about grace and the door is open as long as we need it. In the lesson this morning after the exchange of question, answer and command, there's some speculation about Peter's () or Peter's death by crucifixion. Whether you're young or old, the scripture says the door is open. The second parable that bothered my friend was the one about a certain celebration, couched in terms I think of a wedding feast. No matter. A celebration and a person shows up, and the scripture says he has the wrong garment on they threw him out. How tacky. Surely not. We speak of Christ's hospitality. We speak of God's relentless, unceasing love. You throw the man out. Yes, colleague you throw him out because this was a celebration of those who were repentant and seeking forgiveness, and there was a garment to wear that signified for everyone to see that I have lapsed and I need to be loved back. So you come to a celebration of those who are asking for forgiveness and you don't wear repentance on your clothes, on your face and in your heart. Yes, you are cast out. We are to pray without ceasing, and we are to ponder that which we do not know and understand and struggle that the good Lord can feed our minds and spirits again. We are to provide. We are to provide for the needs of others. See the parable that sticks for me and that this colleague reminded me of is in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. Lord when did we see you hungry or thirsty or in prison and sick and visit you.

Walking out of the Riverside Church on Claremont Avenue many, many years ago with two colleagues. We were in the midst of an euphoric conference about ministry and this profound church, powerful, powerful services. As we leave jabbering to one, a man approaches. You've just been to church. Will you give something to somebody who is hungry? I think you know the rest of the story, don't you. () in you right. I know about con artists, a perfect con right, right outside a church, right at the end of the service. You know this guy is not hungry or do we. So we passed him by. What makes it very poignant for me is my two younger colleagues followed my lead and said I may have said no thank you, which is an incredible response, or nothing at all. It bothered one of them enough that later on when he was working at the Wake Forest Baptist Church, he was gracious enough not to mention me by name. He just talked about the incident and how he felt. How do you know who's hungry unless you feed everybody you can? Sell what you have and give it to the poor. Give it to the hungry. Provide for those who do not have food.

Peter found a way to do that. I imagine the story ended like this. Jesus still on his haunches, the fire still there, Peter looked him full in the face and took a piece of fish and left to go feed others, to pray for them, to ponder with them and to provide for them in every possible way that he could. He had not done that and if the other disciples and apostles had not done that, we would not be here and he would not be there.

The day after Easter I was at New Salem, which is a community for persons who have failed repeatedly to claim the strength of almighty God to overcome their addictions. Jeff Coppedge said to this assembled group, Happy New Year. Day after Easter. In the time of praise one of them talked about being clean for four months or a year and this raucous applause because sisters and brothers the only way we ever do stay clean, the only way we do stay at feeding others is when we are encouraged and supported by one another. The tongues of fire are [encouched?] in something else. That's the presence of Christ's light that gives us the strength individually and together to do that which we ought to do. Love those that are not worth loving by any standard, to forgive those who are not worth forgiving by any standard, to struggle with those who cannot really understand and perhaps do not even want to understand the parables and the power of God's word. So what do we do today? I hope that we take a piece of fish and we follow Christ. END

Chapel Sermon 8/31/95

ED CHRISTMAN: It was a rainy, cold August evening. It was the ninth inning and the score was tied and there had been more errors than hits between Durham and Winston-Salem. I said to my student friends, well, you know we don't have to stay for the extra innings. Eddie Timanus [transcriptionist note: can't remember how to spell his name] said, no, I've never seen an extra inning game. Eddie Timanus was blind. But during the course of the game he at times was able to say from his keen hearing whether the ball at the crack of the bat had gone to right or left field. I've never seen an extra inning game. Knock on Eddie Timanus' door, come in and you are surprised by the fact that it is dark. You have a conversation with a person who has discovered sight in ways that perhaps the rest of us have never known.

Charles B. Dean is an alumnus of Wake Forest, one of three congressmen who refused to sign the Southern Manifesto in 1954, which said we oppose the desegregation decision of the Supreme Court. Congressman Dean had two sights. He could see that he would not be reelected. He was not. He could see that all of us are made in the image of God and that the position himself as placing himself in behalf of that sight was worth more than keeping a vision of segregation in the South or anywhere.

Moses certainly didn't believe he could do God's bidding. But he did. In fact when you think about the biblical characters, what a motley crew they be. Which one of them, I ask you, would you invite to dinner? Which one of them would you think was a likely leader or a person for whom sight would become the powerful tool against darkness? The young teenager hears that she will be pregnant without the benefit of marriage and her sight says, Lord, you have lifted up the lowly and the high and mighty will be brought to their knees. Peter and Paul, are they the kinds of people you would've expected God to use and to whom God gave second sight. The prophet Isaiah prepared us for the Messiah, which the Pharisees and most of us cannot see. A Messiah, the prophet said, whom when we see him we will turn our faces away, an unseemly sight as this Messiah. Wounded, broken and acquainted with grief, that's the Messiah. That's the one we are to see. That's the one we are involved with. Kyle's rendering of the scripture raises the question about what does it mean to have sight. The Pharisees had two problems. One, you didn't work on the Sabbath. Mixing spit with mud and putting it on somebody's eyes regardless of the consequences was work. There is sight in the Mosaic code that curiously enough created blindness and not the laws of God as had been intended. Second problem, they couldn't see a Messiah coming from a ghetto. They couldn't see a Messiah who was trained as a carpenter who had nails put in his hands on behalf of all of us. They couldn't see. So they stumbled and groped in desperation that their sight would give them insight into what had taken place. So they had their own CNN hearing right there asking and reasking the same questions of this man. He was not a theologian. () anything about it, which makes him more clearly God's person to be used in a miraculous way. I do not know whether this man is (). All I know is once I was blind and now I see. He was twice sighted. First, he was given optical sight, and then he was given insight so that when Jesus said, I am the man. How did he know that? I am the son of God. I believe. And his belief immediately led him to become a witness because after the grilling of the questions he said, you keep asking the same questions. Is it that you want to become Jesus' disciples. As Kyle said they were already quite happy (). That really made them angry and they threw him out.

Sin it seems is often associated with physical or emotional (). The bible is even a bit ambiguous about that. But the clearest message is that sooner or later we come to terms with whether or brokenness is and we do not attribute to a person born blind or other persons with physical or emotional illnesses that they are more sinful than we. The point of this story is that sin is self-sufficiency. Sin is the self-reliance that leads us to say I am the master of my faith, the captain of my soul and if I am going to get through this school or if I'm going to teach here, it is because of my own work and my own initiative. Why of course that's partially true. But the sinner has false sight. The sinner draws conclusions about what a Messiah should look like, what my roommate should look like, how my teachers should speak and dress. Limited vision, easy

solution, mathematical propositions. Consider that the bible is not only not a book of literal history. It is not a mathematical textbook. You really rule out getting a help from prob stats or calculus. What you and I hope for is that in these unsavory, strange and unusual characters we can see what we otherwise would be blind to see. These good people, law abiding, believing Jewish disciples of Moses, good people sisters and brothers, were blind because they thought that they could see. They were not prepared to see what Isaiah told them they should see.

A student last summer worked with some acutely handicapped people, and she wrote of her experience. I could see his happiness in his beautiful green eyes. He was unable to speak very well. I learned that this is a world in which we pay so much attention to the exterior that we miss looking inside to see the true beauty of who we are. Now Emily Brewer's experience is dramatic, unforgettable. It's an experience of many who are here and who are at the university. They are willing and able to engage in seeing for people who cannot see, for being with them when they need all kinds of help providing a vision, providing a dream. But there are many here that () and methodically go about their seeing and they are teachers. They see in you and your peers goodness and intelligence and they want those qualities cultivated. They see them in you. They are here as lights upon a path, light upon a landscape. One professor said, it is my vision that the students who I teach would stand on my shoulders. I would gradually rescind myself, decline as they run their vision, deepen their commitment. That is I hope as we would understand the scripture that says you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill is not to be hid, put on a lampstand for all to see.

A second student said this to the freshmen last Friday night. Natalie Merchant and the Ten Thousand Maniacs woke me up nearly ever morning as a freshman with these words. These are the days you remember. Never before and never since I promise will the whole world be as warm as this and as you feel it you will know it's true. That you are blessed and lucky it is true that you are touched by something that will grow and bloom in you. I don't really know what Natalie and the Maniacs have in mind. But I am prepared to surmise that it is possible for me to see in those words that God has created us in God's image that God has breathed the breath of life into us, that we are not alone and we are not self-starters. We will not see anything worth seeing. Except as the writer of this piece, Carolyn Gupton goes on to say, we embrace two things here, solitude and community. In solitude she read a book that a friend had given her. She talks about embracing the questions and goes on to say, do not worry about or expect to get the answers before you can necessarily live them. But you can live the questions and be patient of the uncertainties of your heart. Someone else gave her a book that she might see and it is in community, she said, that you will learn this place, this Wake Forest is a place for the spirit where when one rejoices we all rejoice. When one is in sorrow, we all are in sorrow so why is it that the very first thing I say to the freshmen

and to their parents is to tell them about a student whom they do not know and probably never will. He was in the intensive care unit in Baptist Hospital after the most bizarre, freak accident I'd ever heard about and that we are to lift him up and his family in silent prayer. I could do no other, sisters and brothers, but to lift up the fallen and to say all of us are affected when any one of us is in pain.

So whether it is a teacher who envisions you on his or her shoulders, whether it is the person engaged in working in a church like the Church of the Savior, started by two couples and now a broad expansive ministry in the city of Washington, DC, whether it is what you see in the green eyes of a person who I still prefer to call people handicapped, not what it is mentally and physically challenged. That may be better but for me handicapped because we're all handicapped. We're all deficient, craving clarity to the extent that we would rely upon our own sight however modest and foggy our vision is. Scripture opens us up to welcome all kinds of people if we will but look inside and know that God is with us and God calls us yes to stand on others' shoulders to be light upon a lampstand for others to see.

The music for our concluding hymn was written by Robert Schumann. His music was made much better known because his wife played it very well. The music world was made better because Schumann could see that Brahms and Chopin were persons of great talent. Someone trusted that sight. The text is written by a young woman who like Schumann did not live very long, forty-three. Starting at seven she began to write poetry. The text for this hymn is one of her efforts, and as a youngster she said one day I felt and saw in myself a light and everything was more beautiful after that happened to me. Delicate of health, rigorous of spirit she assisted all kinds of persons in her life. Nothing too great; nothing too small for her to embrace it as a way of showing light. The gospel of John says Jesus is the water that quenches our thirst. Jesus is the bread that feeds our minds and spirits. Jesus is the light that overcomes the darkness and he dares to say you are the light. A city set on a hill is not to be hid, but put on a lampstand for all of us, all of us, to see together. END

Chapel Sermon 1/25 / 96

ED CHRISTMAN: I do not know where it ends and no one can tell me. But I know that I walk the King's Highway. No one can say about the rough and the straight places and the ups and the downs, but I know that I walk the King's Highway. The rough translation of lyrics from a twentieth century hymn set to a traditional English tune. Where did she get such an idea about walking the King's Highway? From a place that you and I perhaps don't spend much time in the eighteenth chapter in the book of Numbers. Because the people of Israel, God's people had been wandering for forty years, and they were trying to get to the promised land, but there was a problem. An enemy actually cousins, but you know how that goes, stood in their

pathway. They had to cross the Edomites land and move across a much traveled road, the King's Highway. So they asked permission, and they promised, not a grape will we take from the vine, not one dram of water will we lift from your wells. We will look neither to the right nor the left if you will let us pass toward the kingdom to which we are supposed to go, that God has given us. Wandering in the desert, faced with an enemy, what is this call that God has given us they had to say. Plagued on every side by ups and downs, a road that doesn't ever seem to end. What kind of God has called us and given us such a dubious gift?

Well, that is how the Bible seems to speak about call whether it's of a people or of you and me. Isaiah was a young priest, spent many times going to the temple. Nothing () happened. But on this particular occasion what he remembers is smoke and fire, a gigantic site and the hem of the Lord's garment filled the temple. Awesome. Majestic. Such that he was led to say woah is me. I am silenced by what I can see. I am undone because no longer can I possibly have control over my life in the presence of what I hear. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of heaven and earth are filled with God's glory. So now that he was no longer calculating his future as most of us do even in church, balancing the equities when he heard a voice say who will go () and deliver the message. Me Lord. Without consulting his rational (), it was as if his heart, not his mouth had been touched in such a way that the heart told the mouth to say, here am I lord, send me. We read on a few verses further you see what kind of agreement Isaiah made. The message, sisters and brothers, was one of devastation to the people who had broken so many of God's laws, such that Isaiah interceded in the midst of getting his message to say, how long oh Lord. How long am I going to have to say this? I mean it's enough about the message. They surely will shoot the messenger. The answer really was until people wake up to the reality that God's ways are not man's ways, and the total commitment and the cost of discipleship are one, and they haven't heard the message yet, you'll have to keep saying. Isaiah was also given other messages, division of the coming of the Lord, out of the stump of the root of Jesse and David, a light, an everlasting light, wonderful counselor, mighty God, king of Kings. He would be able to say that as well. But imagine, imagine going to church but to some other place that potentially is a place where God might speak to you and me and that could be anywhere. But just imagine that whatever is played or sung here this morning, you are overwhelmed by a sense of God's majesty and power and your need is to say send me Lord.

Then you go to the food court to have lunch with your peers and you tell a story. Well, anyone else have something happen in chapel. I don't know about that. I'm just telling you what happened to me. Right. Go to a professor and perhaps I might speculate if she or he is old enough, they might say, well yes. I've had some experiences I couldn't account for or explain. They were strange and mysterious and they changed my life. But what you might get is someone afraid to intercede

or offer any affirmation because either they were unable to connect with any experience of their own or they just did not think that was proper. But you kept telling that story in the Pit to your friends. You called your parents. Someone would soon be taking you to a counselor. It doesn't fit in with the college scene of calculation and expectation and finishing divisionals and getting on with your life. You and I have been programmed away from the biblical sense of call.

Abraham and Sara, old folks, old enough to retire with tenure, go to a place walk the King's Highway. They know not where it ends. They know not how long it will be. They just go. They leave all of the comforts of home. Their hope is in nothing they have known but what they might know that God will reveal to them. Moses has it as they say. () he likes what he does. It's really not that difficult looking after sheep. He gets his message and he stutters his response. I-I-I-I can't do that. He begins a journey that he never ends. Young Samuel doesn't get any help from his teacher. I didn't hear anything. God you see is gracious but he spoke to Samuel more than once, and Samuel got the message and he never was silent after that. Ruth had a choice. Would she with her sister return to the home, to the places she knew and now she was, both of them widowed or would she go with Naomi to a different place and a different people. She said, I want to go with you. How could she count the cost and how could she possibly know how beautiful a story would emerge out of her going. Jeremiah objected. I'm too young. I'm a teenager, Lord. I can't do this stuff. I object. God persisted. Jeremiah said where, and God will write God's laws on your heart and no one else will have to tell you. It will be there forever and ever, a new covenant. Jonah, he got the message too. He ran away. Although he delivered the message. Jonah's descendants are still sitting, pondering, calculating, trying to figure out what in the world to do and what to (). The call of God is unrelenting. The call of God is frightening. The call of God requires hot coals to touch our cold hearts.

This week I had lunch with a graduate of Wake Forest, graduated college, law school, spent ten years in business with a tough job, which she was quite successful. Then she described to me the last year, a strange series of experiences that I could not connect with except in one regard, and in one regard only could I understand some of these meditations that she had and what they led her to believe. I'm going to sell my condo. I'm going back to North Carolina. I'm going to seek if I possibly can and become a photographer. I could connect with that in the sense that it was so bizarre that it lined up with some of the things that have happened to me that I didn't deserve either. She's not claiming any special blessing. She is simply saying one day in my life things changed. Now have I got a beautiful story to tell you about that. No, the only reason we're talking is because I have to remind her of what happened to her three years ago in another part of the country, and she must not forget that warming of her heart and must continue to seek to find out what it means.

A more recent graduate came to me saying, I believe the Lord wants me to be a missionary. But it's going to cost some money. I'll have to go somewhere and get training and I don't have the money. Well, yes, I have some savings, but see (). I kind of need a nest egg because I may get married. I just think if God wants me to do this mission work God must provide the money. () perhaps it means that God will provide is based on your expending your savings and losing control of your destiny. He was silent.

In this chapel just a very short time ago, after forty years they do begin to blur a little bit. Two or three years ago, a young man stood right there, a senior. He talked about his life and how he'd been an okay person here and been to church some and not gone, and one night he's sitting in his room. It is a Saturday night. That's a quiet time for some people. Listened to his music in the dark and all the lights were (). He said, I knew somehow in a way that I had never known and a depth that I could not imagine that God loved me and I had been saved. Does that mean that he or my friend who went to law school have to work this out this sense of purpose and direction like Isaiah or Jeremiah. No, it doesn't mean that. This young man is in graduate school.

A colleague this week, a young colleague said God calls us not necessarily according to our abilities, but in spite of our weaknesses. I said I'm going to use that. Thank you for the gift. God calls us not necessarily in accordance with our talents but in spite of our weaknesses and what is chief among those weaknesses, our need and desire, almost our obsession to control the future, even how God will deal with us. Through and beyond the divisionals, through and beyond college. Of course there are things to learn. There are things to do and experiences to have here and we will open our hearts to them and our minds will fall. But if on the other hand we are afraid that we might lose control that we wouldn't be able to explain to our parents what was going on, then it will be very difficult for God's knocking on the door to lead to its being open. It could be in a temple like with Isaiah. It could be in this room on a Saturday in the dark. It could be a host of places, but in the story that Judd read from the New Testament it was on a dusty road and Jesus was at the point of moving from Galilee to Jerusalem where all things were going to happen. There are no names to these people, please notice. So if you like to insert your name, be my guest. Someone in a moment of rare non-reflection said, Lord, I'll follow you anywhere. Beware of absolutes in the presence of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. See Jesus would have been a good teacher. He didn't put him down. He didn't put her down. He just told this person what he meant foxes have holes, the birds of the air () following me to the kingdom of God, there's a () path you have to follow. Someone else sensing that Jesus was something unique, a person beyond personhood, said, I'll follow you when Jesus asked him follow me. But first let me go home and bury the dead. Now this really doesn't compute does it. Leave the dead to bury the dead. As for you go and

proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, get on the Kings Highway. Time is now. As someone was typing this scripture they said, but it says no one who puts their hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. She said I'm not fit. I said, you're right about that. I'm not right. I'm not fit either. Two-sided message. The first part of it is you must turn loose control of your life and give up that weakness and the strength of almighty God, and secondly you must know that the day after Isaiah's experience, Isaiah was not sure of who he was or what would happen to him but for the grace of almighty God. He who puts his hand to the plow, Jesus is the plow. Turning the soil over and over, planting the seeds of salvation. Changing life. Making what we thought was right wrong and wrong right in terms of our sense of who we are. We belong to God and will we claim it. Or will we run away from it. I don't know where the road leads. I don't know about its ups and downs. I don't know its end. I know that I am called to walk the King's Highway. So God sent Christ. Christ sends us. Are you ready to travel this highway? END

Chapel Sermon 4/24/97

ED CHRISTMAN: The only word you hope to hear this morning is extension. Extension on papers that are due. Exams postponed until July. Such delivery of that promise I cannot make. But I can say having consulted with Dean Winter that we believe it is possible for you to submit a devotional reading, a drawing on whatever for the Book of Days for next year before you leave from school to wherever you are going this summer. So April the 30th was a goal, not the final date, and I certainly hope you will find time in the midst of your studies to offer something for yourself and for your peers.

It was about four-thirty in the morning and I stumbled from the bed in the motel to the phone. The doctor said, Mr. Christman, your father has expired. I didn't know that word until that moment. If he had said in the rural part of North Carolina from whence my father came that he had passed, that we would understand. If he had said, we lost him, we would all know what that means. We would not understand very much if one of the translations of the word for death in the scripture is he fell asleep. But if he said Mr. Christman, your father has died and he is as dead as a doornail, a bit crass wouldn't that be. But the finality of death and its certainty are not to be ignored, and so mother and I began the rituals that are accompanied such an event and provides some distraction from the reality that is one of my friends here said when his wife died, it is so final. Indeed taxes may be certain, but death outstrips it by far. The question is how do we address it? How do we look at it? How do we understand it? Indeed is there any understanding of it at all.

This year at Wake Forest we have had the opportunity, as cruel and tragic as it may be, to ask ourselves why do people of a young age die for apparently no good purpose. We are forced some of us to say in God's own good time there is

no guarantee of life. The gift of life is not that you will live three score and ten as the song says. For you three score and ten even if you allowed for four score gives you plenty of slack. But you see at sixty-seven, I look at those numbers somewhat differently than you. But both of us look at the reality that death is as near as life. Therefore, how do we address it. How do we understand it? For some it is necessary to laugh. Of all the funerals I've been to, I'm not sure of any funeral that at either after the service or while we ate and drank to each other's health and in memory of the deceased there wasn't a story and there wasn't laughter.

There is a story of a man who knowing that he was going to die prepared his tombstone, and after he died, the stone was erected. It had his name, his dates and it said at the bottom, I told you I was sick. We are sick, sick of being frightened by the fact that we are afraid of death. We do not understand our own, however near or far it may be, and we doubt that it is near. We certainly have difficulty when others die whom we know and love and for whom there is a finality and an emptiness that is very hard to bear. Therefore, we look for comfort wherever we can find it.

A recent visitor here, Taylor Field, who also gave the baccalaureate sermon three years ago, an alumnus of our institution, said he gets some comfort when he thinks about death by realizing that in one hundred years he and Arnold Schwarzenegger will look exactly alike, exactly alike. Well, then wherein is any sense of what we talk about at the time of death of how we know that now one parent has been connected to another, that there are conversations, that there are images of the death of the dead being stars or being like angels. In fact even Jesus makes this allusion. What is it about recognition? If in fact Christians, some Christians decide to be cremated, where is the recognition? How do we imagine that we survive. Paul in his text struggles with that. He suggests that there is some kind of identity. But then he says what () I read to you. Flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God. Flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God. We are born the scripture says out of the dust of Adam and the second Adam is of the spirit when we are dust of the earth. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust, cremated or not.

But you say well, yes but Chaplain, Jesus, Jesus was recognizable in the stories that we listen to with great care. Yes and no. He was recognizable. It took his word in one instance before Mary knew who he was. It took him eating fish for others to know who he was. It took the scientific Thomas poking his hand in his side to know who he was. After all he appeared and disappeared. Paul struggles with the imponderable effort to explain that Jesus was raised from the dead, that something happened that changed history and gave us the opportunity to look upon death as a door and not as a stone wall, to look upon death as the opening to life and not as termination. For some people it is a termination whether it's three score and ten or four score. You live your life to the fullest. You do the good things that you can do. You regret the things you did

that were wrong and you die. Others say, no, there is a moral ladder up and down. The animal, human chain. You can be and you will be reincarnated. It is fun sometimes to imagine what one would like to be. One of my friends said she wanted to be a cow, chewing on grass. Having worked very hard in her life as she saw it, she looked for the tranquil existence of a cow in a meadow. Others of us might have a higher opinion of where we are on that moral ladder than others, but nonetheless for many millions of people reincarnation answers the question of whether or not there is flesh and blood that inherits the kingdom of God. Scripture says otherwise. But Jesus does not make it easier for us to understand. For first his own appearances were like that. Secondly, when asked specifically by the Sadducees, what about resurrection and they thought they had figured it out, they said let us suppose there is a woman who marries the first of seven brothers and in succession each of them dies and she marries the next one. Jesus, when they all get to heaven to whom is she married. Jesus said, you don't understand at all do you. There's no giving and receiving of marriage in heaven. Notice he never answers the question. He simply says you have missed the point of what we are saying when we say I am the resurrection and the light that there is a door that opens beyond death and all of our analytical analysis of how to trip each other up with some clever syllogism do not work. For either you accept the imponderable notion that Paul puts forth or you are left to reincarnation or to extinction. Paul says there is something called a spiritual body. But he doesn't tell us what it is. He doesn't tell us what it looks like. Yet if it were possible, sisters and brothers, for us as we comfort one another, as we care for each other, as we laugh and cry together at our loss, if we can somehow communicate that we know in Christ there is life everlasting. That was very troubling to me as a child. Life everlasting. Life with God forever. So my parents were required to leave the light on in the hall as I went to sleep in the hope that somehow the light would dispel my fear of timelessness. Little did I know that when I would grow up I would still have the same problem with the idea that there are no clocks in heaven. At times I would say well, in that case I'm not going. I can't imagine a world that is not time bound, in which there are not beginnings, middles and ends of things. Well, of course I can't imagine it. Flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God. Somehow or other the faith of resurrection is in the belief that I do not need to know or can't I know what it means to be resurrected. What does it mean to live with God? Are there seminars and discussions about all of the issues that we have found unsolvable here. Is it ridiculous that two ministers at the Crescent Hill Church many years ago both lost children to cancer and they said when we get to heaven, we've got some questions to ask. We're going to demand some answers. Job's friends thought there had to be some answers. For the first eleven days they sat with him silently and offered him the strength and the love of their presence with a situation that was not reducible to words. But alas sin overtakes us all in our desire to have answers to all the questions. Even the faith questions have to be answered. By Job it's got to be that you have sinned

mightily to be punished so. There's got to be a connection. He vigorously denied it. The book seeks to struggle with that question and it ends with the suggestion that Job doesn't know the answer. God has not told him.

So what do we say to persons like the Tim Alexander's parents. What do we say to the parents of a person your age who commits suicide. What do we say when a tree falls on a forty-five year old woman leaving a wife and two children, precious little sister. But we hold them and we pray for the strength that in resurrection there is the kernel of a beginning of truth that somehow we need not know the answers. We need to practice but Wendell Berry says, practice resurrection. Live as Paul said to the Corinthians doing the work of the Lord, envisioning the most, widest possible majestic strain that the creator could offer. Why should life be terminal? Why should life with God be anything like sinful broken life that we live here. One of the things that my father did say before he died was that if life is only what we have lived these years, it is hardly worth living considering what happens, the cruelty, the pain, the death, yes, the brokenness of the sinner. If there is not something else, it is not worth living. Now one of my philosophy professors was quick to say well, that's, he'd heard me say that in a sermon and he was put off. Didn't impress him. It need not, sisters and brothers, it gave me at least a clue to deal with the question, why do I need this light on when I can't understand eternal life. I need not. I only hope for it. I see a resurrection and the strength and the power to believe that God's power to give life beyond death knows no limit, is timeless. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun, and because he lives I too shall live. So whether we live or die at whatever age, we live and we die in the Lord. The Lord who was dead, was raised and lives forever and ever. Amen. END

Chapel Sermon 8/28/97

ED CHRISTMAN: What a glorious sight from my vantage point. Thank you for coming. Thank you for Rob Ulery for playing the organ and choosing marvelous hymns and Andy Clark for singing. We'll video tape something and then just use it. I call your attention to the announcements and in particular to this card I hope you will fill it out. The ushers will collect them as you leave. The ushers are members of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity who have agreed to usher every Thursday that we are here in this chapel, which will not be next week. But we will resume in two weeks when John Mendez and a portion of the gospel choir will be with us. I hope that you will make this part of your schedule. Again, I'm glad you're here.

Grow until you die and you will enter the kingdom of God sitting at the banquet table of the Lord. Grow until you die and you will inherit everlasting life. That it seems to me to be the clear message of scripture and certainly of the parable, which Greg has read for us. Now there are certainly reasons to grow, and we find them first in the Old Testament. The song clearly says, you shall be like a tree planted by rivers of waters that brings forth your fruit in your season. Your leaf also shall

not wither and whatsoever you doeth shall prosper. On the other hand the chaff is like the wicked and the wicked are somehow like the tree which is not going to grow which is not a godly tree. Jeremiah says the godly tree is one that grows in spite of the heat, in spite of drought, and singer David Wilcox suggests that the roots go deeper when the ground is dry.

Now because it is the first Thursday and the second day of class and the emphasis is upon nearly one thousand freshmen, I was compelled to say a word for seniors--indeed even those who might want to become seniors some day--because there is a parable that struck me some years ago as being extraordinarily appropriate, but not for a baccalaureate or a commencement because then it's after the fact. It is the familiar short parable of the owner of an orchard who comes looking at his peach trees and he sees this one tree and it hasn't produced a single peach. How long has this tree been here, he says to the gardener? Three years. Three years. No fruit. Cut it down. Oh no Master. After all they're only juniors. I mean, it's only a three-year-old tree. [laughter] I'll put a lot of fertilizer around and I'll water it, and we will hope and we will pray that by next year it will grow well says the master. Give it one more year. It does sound a bit harsh, but as we shall understand shortly when we look particularly at the parable of the talents, we may not really be talking about a harsh God. We may be talking about a very generous God. Now how is it that we grow? How is it that we collect ideas and thoughts and put them together in the light that is in truth a sacred journey.

If you read the first issue of *Old Gold and Black* for freshmen or if you read the one this week, you'll get part of the answer on the editorial page. Jennifer Goff and her roommate decided last summer that they wanted to have some fun and work just enough to pay for the fun. That was their plan. Philadelphia, New York, where they worked for a company that manufactured screws. That didn't seem to be exactly what they had in mind. But Jennifer's roommate's aunt read an advertisement in a newspaper in Maine: Wanted young people to come and work at a camp for disabled children. Why not? They got there. No experience, no background and Jennifer says, well, yes, I did a little stuff in high school but in college I lived in what we shall call Disney World of Wake Forest. I had my comfort zone. I looked at these children and I looked at their personal needs, at what intimate involvement I would have with these children, and I said not for me. She stayed but many of the other counselors did not. The work hours got longer, sometimes sixteen and seventeen hours a day. Exhausted emotionally and physically, a banged up knee she was ready to quit half way through the summer and called her sister and told her her story, and she was crying and the sister said, well, gee why don't you quit? She found herself giving all the reasons why she couldn't quit. She finished the summer, but she couldn't get her car packed to leave. It took her all day long. Why is that? Because in the process of her effort to grow and to adventure and do something she had never done before and go where she had never been before she found that these disabled children gave her far more than she had given

to them and she didn't want to leave. When she got home looking like she felt, exhausted and still the banged up knee, dad said, why didn't you quit? Well, you see Dad I couldn't quit because I made a commitment. Growing involves a commitment. It's not only the vision. It is the intention, the will to follow through. I made a commitment. This is not exactly what she said perhaps, but in mythological terms we could say it this way because it's in (). Besides Dad, I'm going back next summer. Grow until you die and you will enter the kingdom of God.

Do you have to be a teenager, a young teenager, short of stature, pugnacious fighting your way to stay alive on the streets of Chicago who is befriended by two men, twice his age and who show him a way out of the drug culture. Do you have to be that young man who now has co-authored a book, has been on *Book Notes* for crying out loud, CNN. Do you have to be this young man to be able to say as a part of his own growing and his own vision when asked the question, what are you going to do with the money you get from the book? Well, one of the things I'm going to do is fix up grandma's house because I want my grandchildren to live in that house. That's growing until you die and you will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now the parable. Let's not forget the parable. A talent represents an awful lot of money. Five, it might be, it's several thousands of dollars. So what are you going to do? Are you going to invest in mutual funds and take the risk of the market or are you going to invest it in a bank like say Wachovia? Put it in an interest bearing account where you are guaranteed that two point three or three point two, not very much, but it is safe there. Which are you going to do? When the landlord offered the money, which really wasn't money, understand me. When he offered them their lives and said go and invest your life according to your abilities, he was really asking them to deal with something underneath all of that. What's underneath that is the willingness to grow or their refusal to grow and therefore their invitation for themselves to die. Which is it going to be? At once the first two went off and invested their lives in countless ways we don't know how. We do not know how, but the symbol is the money. They took a risk. They made an investment and they came back bearing gifts.

Now we have to be, I have to be sympathetic with this one talent person because I too calculate my future. I too worry about everything our children driving to and from work, to school, what's going to happen to our lives getting older, extended health care. I worry about all kinds of things. I calculate. I try to do the right thing. Is there anything wrong with that? No, there's nothing wrong with that unless you have not asked yourself one more question. He said, Master, you were hard. I mean, you were hard, harsh. Now ironically the only one in the parable dealt with hard or harshly is the one who said that's who God was. He had forgotten that the gift of life, the gift of land, the gift of air, the gift of it all comes from God and the chance to live and make decisions and to make choices is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. It was his gift that makes it

possible for us to choose, whether we will bury ourselves as surely as he put the money in the ground, buried himself to a predictable and comfortable, calculated life which I can understand and yet as a Christian must seek to reject.

So it is in the *Book of Days* and I recommend it that you find a student writing as follows. This is Stacy Schuman. "Go on your own journey. Do not let others hold you back and don't hold them back. Do not judge their journey and don't judge them and don't let them judge yours. Pack your bags and get out your map. Don't worry about where you will go and what you will see. Go where your heart leads. Your soul knows the way. It will speak quietly through the voice of your heart, your wisdom, your intuition. You will meet and learn from everyone you need to along the way. Do not limit your own experiences." Then this next word is so beautiful. "Relax. We are on a journey of discovery. Life will reveal itself to you." The book *Sacred Journey* speaks of grace notes, events in the past that somehow put together knit a life and give you the strength to try and do different things and be a person fully aware of God's gracious gift of life itself. Are you prepared to do that? Am I prepared to do that? You begin by looking back and asking yourselves, who are the people? What are the events? Where are all the places that have given my life shape whether they were events of sorrow or joy or just strange events that made no particular sense but somehow I keep remembering. Because it is in remembering that you can hope that those memories can crystallize with our own strength here and now in this place.

You can grow. This room is a place that grows. If you did nothing but study the windows and responded to the beautiful artistic work of a German craftsman. If you came and played the piano and the organ, and they're here all the time, and recognized how many gifts musicians and songwriters have given us to nourish our soul. If you simply came here to sit and ponder what it means to talk about the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. If you went to the meditation room in Benson. If you went to the waterfall. If you took a walk anywhere. If you sat in your room as Carrie King says in her meditation here, in five minutes of solitude she said, all the time we say God is great, God is good. We just say those things at meal time. We just rush through. Five minutes she says of solitude will help you understand who you are, who you ought to be. There are books. There are magazines. There are works of art. There are people. There are places here to nourish you. This is lively soil. Whether it is a senior concerned about being cut down in one more year or a freshman who doesn't have a clue as to where she or he is going, Ms. Schmidt says, pack your bags. Take a journey. Yes, you would know I would have to mention him. Shel Silverstein says it all. If you have a magic carpet, you have been given the gift of life and it will take you anywhere. To Spain or excuse me Jennifer, Maine or anywhere. So will you let God's gift of life take you where you have never been before with persons you've never known with ideas you haven't understood, with religious understanding that's different from that with which you came. Will you let it take you where you've never been before or will you bury it

and yourself on the floor? That's your choice. That's my choice. God is not harsh. God is very gracious unto us all. The question is what will we do with God's grace. What will we do and what will we be with God's grace? END

Chapel Sermon 4/23/98

ED CHRISTMAN: Good morning. Pentecost. What is Pentecost? It is bungee jumping without a cord. It is listening to music that is beyond your decibel control. It is being out of control. It is leaving your day planners at home. I knew I would find you. It is those twenty-nine magnificent microphones and speakers hung in Wake Chapel when the Indigo Girls were here. That, sisters and brothers, is a whisper in comparison with Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish holiday to celebrate the harvest, fifty days after Passover. But as you can see the harvest is of something else. The harvest is of the Holy Spirit laid upon you and me, and as Ken Medima's song says, "If there's no fire from heaven." Peter testified in Jerusalem that day that there was a fire from heaven. He had all sorts of rather spectacular things to report including all these people speaking the same message in different languages, and yet all of them somehow could be understood as having received tongues of fire. But he went on to suggest, Mr. Medima did, that the tongues of fire meet human compassion. If there is not human passion, he said, then it doesn't matter what songs we sing. It doesn't matter how we spend our time. It doesn't matter who is paid for our education or our income as professional Christians as some of us are. It doesn't matter.

Now Peter did not have a high SAT score. He probably made average grades except in fishing where he was somewhat superior. But his insights as they unfold in the books of Acts are not only that he claimed the attention of all the Jews who were there, those who had bypassed the message of Jesus, those who had thought he was yet one more Maccabee come to town to raise a lot of Cain and give us trouble with the Romans and with ourselves to confuse us. Or indeed as he suggested rather bluntly, you may have been some of the ones who really stood there and yelled crucify him. His message was for them too. Tongues of fire have come. The Holy Spirit is here. Christ has risen. But before the books of Acts is done with Peter, he not only says to the Jews who were there in Jerusalem, but he says to the hated and despised Roman represented by Cornelius the Gentile. God is no respecter of persons and the Holy Spirit has come upon this man. He was audacious man this Peter. He invited the slaves of a Roman soldier to break bread in the house of his mother in law or some other person who was hosting him. We're not sure. What we are sure of is it was a violation of all of the eating codes of Judaism. But something like the fire from heaven was hold of Peter. God is no respecter of persons. The message is for persons of all languages, all lifestyles, old and young, rich and poor. That's the message from Peter a frightening, liberating message to which we now hear this parable.

We really want the bible to be sweet don't we and kind and generous and somewhat like the boy scout and girl scout oath so we can manage it because after all we're all pretty good people. Parables are disquieting. There's no Alka Seltzer to take care of what it does to the heart and the soul and the mind. You have to hear it. Spirit of God came, landed upon you and me and we bore no fruit and God said cut him down. I don't know who this person is in the parable. Is this Jesus being our advocate for God? No Lord, let's give them a little more time to bear fruit. So as Jennifer asked you, what fruit do you bear?

A person retires this year after nineteen years from campus ministry at Wake Forest. What did students say, alumni and present students say about David Rife last Saturday night? They said that he forced us to look at the hard texts including the parables in scripture. He respected us as persons. He let us make mistakes and only stepped in when it was really essential and he forced us to do that which made us uncomfortable.

James Dodding is leaving this year. Just as David Rife has been a fruit bearing tree, this English American who has worked here in the speech department for twenty years and directed all kinds of plays. It's curious how when I told people repeatedly, this is the most if not the most, one of the most devoted Christians fruit bearing tree that I have ever met. They seemed surprised. I don't know why. How could you be surprised that when a man decides that he last play he will direct is the *Promenade Passion* play for the second time and twice on the main stage as a full length play. But it is this man's devotion to his belief that this is a Christian university. It is his devotion and his belief of the story that Jesus came, was crucified and was resurrected, and most assuredly the spirit has come as fruit bearing tree.

Students have come and some like Joel the prophet, Joel said had visions and dreams. We have a volunteer service corps because two of them, () from Boston and Libby Bell from Greenville, South Carolina mystically were joined with Henry Cooper an alumnus who wanted to give something back. What did he give us? Fifteen hundred hours as a volunteer, talking to people, laying the foundation. Now we have a fruit bearing organization, not unlike the fruit bearing organizations in campus ministry where people go to the prison on a regular basis and the soup kitchen on a regular basis and to Brookridge Retirement Center, to public schools, to churches, to a whole host of places out of gratitude that God has blessed us and what can we do in return. We can be grateful and what is the measure of our gratitude other than our passion to see that the spirit laid upon us will remain the fire from heaven.

Frederick Beakner says it, what is grace? What is God's grace? Well, you cannot buy it and you cannot earn it. You cannot go out and get it. It is given to you because that's what it is, a gift. You can't earn it anymore than you can earn the right to taste good strawberries and cream or to be handsome or to make good grades based upon your intellect. It is a gift,

and after all he continues, you did not birth yourself. You have to be grateful. So here you are. You might not have been, but the party would not have been the same and it wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world, terrible and beautiful things happen. Be not afraid. Nothing separates me from you. God says, I am with you for I made the universe for you and I love you. The only catch Beakner concludes is that the grace of God is a gift, and therefore you must reach out and take it. You want to be a fruit-bearing tree. God is giving you grace. Will you take it?

So I had to bring something to establish my connection with Peter. This was given to me. This stole was given to me by a young woman, a Wake Forest alumna and she bought it, of course, in Jerusalem. I found out that covetousness is really true because people have looked at me wearing this and say, where did *you* get that? Like you don't deserve it. And I don't. But you see this young woman whose life was changed one day when in this very chapel I had to say to a group of people such and such a person and persons will not get married because the groom did not show up. She wanted me to have something to wear at weddings and memorial services and to preach in chapel because somehow her life was going to go beyond her terrible, terrible pain. Lay your pains aside, sisters and brothers. Listen to the heartbeat of the flame of the Holy Spirit that you and I might be fruit bearing trees. We'll stand on the promises and we will hear Ken Medima tell us what to do. END

Chapel Sermon 4/29/99

ED CHRISTMAN: One student wanted to find out because of the advertising about chapel service whether Jonah was a wimp. They should realize the chaplain would employ almost any means to get your attention, grateful that I have gotten the attention of some. So let's clarify the first. Jonah was no wimp. He was not a man without a problem. Jonah's problem is your problem and mine and this (). Jonah believed that he understood what God's role was and he was following it, day and night. Jonah did not realize however that it was not his plan but God's plan and the difference between his understanding of what kind of God God was and what kind of creature and what kind of human being Jonah was was as wide as the sea that tried to separate him from his assignment. Now how do we understand what was Jonah's problem. Well, first he doesn't tell us. He just leaves. But we learn later that he is angry from the very beginning because he believes that God's grace will prevail, that God is not a four-square God but a God with a lot of curves, a lot of flexibility. God is a God of grace who at the very first sign that Ninevah repented would relent and twice in the passage that Brad summarized it said something which we find difficult to comprehend in scripture. The sovereign God changed his mind. That is what angered Jonah so terribly much.

How is he going to deal with grace? How is he going to deal with a God who actually does allow for repentance in any () generation and the test is of course made even clearer and more striking. What might have happened had these two killers, these two shooters not killed themselves. But just imagine that after the desecration and the destruction that they had wrought, they put down their guns and were put in prison and brought to trial and asked for permission to speak in their own defense and just broke down and cried and made no real excuses. They just said what they did was wrong, beyond measure, beyond their own comprehension. You the jury, what are you supposed to do? How would you respond? And though it may seem like a worst case scenario, at the first sign of repentance God forgives even those, even those two young men, even Milosevic who would be subject to redemption if he repented. I almost don't want to believe that's possible. So part of Jonah is in me. I want to see some satisfaction. I want to see some bloodletting. I want my way of understanding how the world () and not God's way to prevail. But I can't do that.

Last semester in law school, I hear a man preach. I get a message, a clear message, a brand new message that I should go to seminary. So I go to the man before he leaves who has been God's instrument to bring this about. Dr. () tells me if he can do any other thing but be a minister do that. I didn't understand this. This past week I got an email from a student from a nearby school who said he is thinking about the ministry. But he's been told that he should fight against that and only do it if he has to. See somehow God's grace was so great in my case, I wasn't asked to repent of all my sins. I simply got a message that I should go to seminary because I'm not sure that Jonah or Paul or Peter or Mary or Martha or Miriam or anyone else can ever so purify themselves as to be capable presumably of being God's servants in the world. So I will write to my friends and say I have to respect and honor England's understanding of how to interpret messages from God and the struggle we all have to figure out whatever your vocation whatever your call is. But for me like an elder member of this community who was also a minister the first time, he even thought that God wanted him to serve, he grasped the () because he wasn't sure that God might not change his mind. () but Jonah had a terrible problem doing that. So God asked him, Jonah, you love the plant, which you didn't grow. You hated the worm that ate the plant that destroyed your shade. You hated this city that in which I asked you to preach and you preached so well, Jonah. You know Jonah if I needed another prophet you see I'd ask you again. You did a wonderful job. But why is it that I should not be concerned especially a city of 120,000 who not only fasted for three days. They did the impossible. They put on sackcloth and ashes on all their cattle as well. How is it Jonah that you don't understand? When Jesus was asked to show a sign, he said the only sign I will offer you is the sign of Jonah. Or Jonah preached an () generation then and now repents and that's the only sign that you will get of Jesus () the question. And do you know sisters and brothers the one greater than Jonah is here.

The part of the scripture that is not in the bible, which I have managed to add from the book of Jonah is not only that Jonah would be asked again to be a prophet, a real final bottom line declaration of God's grace. You see Jonah I love the plant and I love the worm and I love the cattle and I love people and I love you enough to die for you. Jesus didn't tell the scribes and the Pharisees or the other people gathered there that day that he was going to die, but he had told Peter that. Peter couldn't believe that. No one could believe that the Son of God would die for him. But God's ways are not our ways. God's love transcends all that we can imagine and it's troubling and it is difficult if not impossible to believe in our own strength, but that is the declaration. That is the good news. We don't need any other sign () because one greater than Jonah is here. He died and he was resurrected. He set the standard of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. So it doesn't matter whether you're going to teach or preach or work in the community in any one of a million ways or be an accountant or a lawyer, I think with all due respect to the polity and the difficulty that it represents almost and forsake my own ordination, I think that God calls everyone. The question is are we prepared to hear the call.

There is one in our midst who has heard the call. In prayer and in praxis, in prison, the hospital, the soup kitchen, in countless ways he has lived a life of affirmation, a life of gratitude and we can't repay David Fouche for that. In fact it would be absurd to try. We accept by God's grace the gift and we ask ourselves what does it mean for you and me that there are persons like that in our midst. What does it mean to you and me that there are persons in our families or our halls who in this crazy time with computers that do not work, with more papers and less than time than you have, with stress that is out of bounds, why Chaplain would you dare tell us all about God's grace. Because one morning next week early one of you or more will look up from your computer as those first rosy () of light crease the darkness. It's just in a rare moment that you would say God loves me more than all of this. No matter what I chose as a vocation, God's grace sustains and feeds me. It is the water of life. It is the bread of life. And I need not, need not be afraid. David and I share an appreciation of the certain farmer of eastern Kentucky. His name is Wendell Berry and among other things he knew what to do with the anger which Jonah seemed to be able to displace. He knew where to put that anger. He said in part, do something every day that does not compute. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love persons who do not deserve it. Practice hospitality. Plant trees whose shade you will never enjoy. Put your faith in the two inches of humus that grow up under giant trees in a thousand years. Rejoice although you have considered all of the facts. Laugh as the millennium is coming. When other people can predict the motions of your mind, lose it. Leave it as a sign of the path you did not follow, make more tracks than are necessary just like a fox does. Some in the wrong direction. Practice resurrection. END

Chapel Sermon 9/2/99

ED CHRISTMAN: In the garden Jesus said to his disciples, watch and pray. Be awake. Be alert. They failed miserably their final exam. He gave them more than one exam, and they failed all of the exams because of the weakness of the flesh and the lack of spirit. And now we ponder the end of the age for the end of this millennium and with all of our technology we still don't even know how to count because the millennium doesn't even begin until 2001. That doesn't bother us too much. Besides Jesus was born in either 4 or 6 BC and so we blew it. We missed it. It was a few years ago. But it serves as a warning and as a reminder, however inconvenient it may be if some of these machines don't work. We'll rely on our friends who bought generators and their hospitality. When that runs out, people didn't learn in truth what it means to live out of the spirit and not by all of the good comfortable things that inhabit this community for the rest of us.

But C.S. Lewis has tried to say to us what it means to consider this day, this very day, as the last day. How would you behave? Endlessly we say to our advisees and you say to one another, you say to yourself, I'm going to figure this out about my vocation. I submit to you, you'll flunk that test as well. If your vocation is to be a son or daughter of almighty God, you will flunk the test by the ways we have lined up for you and designed for you to find out who you are and who you ought to be. You're to watch and to pray.

Mary of Bethany listened for somehow she instinctively knew, not gradually, instinctively knew that Jesus her friend, the friend of her brother and sister was different. She wanted to hear everything he had to say. She may even have asked questions and was oblivious to what was going on in the kitchen. The impact of that encounter was that she did the most irrational and foolish thing possible. She took a very precious commodity, which could have been used to feed the poor, and poured that precious ointment on the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. Everybody was embarrassed and angered by her efforts. She had found her calling. She had watched; she had prayed and she had acted in a spirit of who she thought God wanted her to be, a risk taker.

Jonah couldn't get the message. Jonah was cerebral. He had figured out who God was and how God was to function, and when he realized in all of his honesty and insight that God was not going to act that way, he became very angry. Jonah by the grace of God is a work in progress. He is trying to shift from all this business about how we earn a living instead of living a life that God has given us to live, taking the risks that we ought to take. Don't listen to me. Listen to the dean of the college who at orientation said to the thousand freshmen and their parents, oh that they could have heard. The parable

of the talent said, Dean Ascot said, that if you take what you have been given and you cautiously plan your life as if you can figure it out, you will fail. You are here to take risks and to take chances by the grace of God I say. That is the vocation to which you are called.

Peter figured it out. It took him a very long time. He was a kind of person who might just impulsively rush into a situation only to feel and be like a fool. He may tell the most outlandish claims about who Jesus was and then turn right around and repudiate what he had just said. He wanted to be the number one star so he was going to walk on the water, and all of the sudden he became proud of his walking and he nearly drowned. When after the coming of the number one coward of the universe, Peter was there for breakfast. Jesus said do you love me? Then feed my sheep. Peter got the message and the sheep were Gentiles and Jews. They were Roman soldiers and poor people from Syria or anywhere else he could find them. God is no respecter of persons. He got the message.

The message you get will not come in a bottle at a seashore I do not suspect. It may come from a hugging parent. It may come from a friend who says a word of encouragement. It may come from someone who says well, if you think that's what you do, then why don't you do it. It may come from an advisor. It may come from a class, a piece of music. If you are watching and praying, you will come to know your vocation, which is to act out of gratitude toward every person whom you meet. It is to acknowledge that God's gift in Jesus Christ allows you the freedom to risk it all. Oh yes, that means for some leaving school and getting a job. That means for others changing their entire direction in life. I think we like to say, change your lifestyle. That means, be ye transformed by the renewal of your heart and you listen to what your heart says and your mind will follow close by. I've said that repeatedly to students and parents. Do you know they really do not flush and become disturbed. It as if someone has tried to keep this a secret. If you are going to follow the vocation that God has given you, you must take risks. You must listen to the sounds inside of you and the sounds of silence that feed you where you have never been or dared ventured before. It means that you need the help of others, their encouragement. It means that you will never, never settle for what only your mind tells you. It is your heart that is so frightening because it beats in ways, in measures that are not customary to our culture or to yours. Watch and pray Jesus said to his disciples.

Then what Melissa told us or what Amelia told us this morning in a beautiful story warm in this sedate and quiet place on this beautiful day, we do not want to hear this. There really will be a judgment day. There really will be an accounting based upon our choices. That's between sheep and goats and it will not be as Jonah would have had it some theological doctrine that holds us all together and is the linchpin of who we are and what we believe. No, it will not be Jonah. It will be the impulsive act that has the only theological foundation Jesus said matters and that is do you help others and do

you care for people. Now we don't all work at the soup kitchen and we don't all go to Macedonia. But every solitary single person can love another person, can hope for them, can give them nurture and health and it is on that basis that Jesus and almighty God make the final choice of who the sheep and who the goats are. Watch and pray brothers and sisters. Watch and pray for the opportunities to discern how you help others out of the gratitude for the gracious gift of life that God has given you. Watch and pray. END

Chapel Sermon 1/13/00

ED CHRISTMAN: Behold, we have stumbled in darkness, and we rejoice that the light comes. Behold the burden of sin upon our shoulders has been broken and we are free to love the Lord. Do you see with your eyes, the eyes of your heart? A wonderful counselor, a relentless peacemaker has been given to us, the brightest and the best of all stars is with us and we can rejoice for we can see what we never saw before. Can you imagine the lamb and the wolf are together? The cow and the bear graze alongside one another. Can you imagine that the darkness of sin and death has been removed. Can you see with your eyes a vision that had never occurred to your or to me? Behold all things new. Light becomes life for everyone. Can you see and behold with the eyes of your heart? Martin Luther King Jr's vision, the family of God. Can you see with the eyes of your heart that Mother Teresa welcomed the opportunity to bring life out of death? Can you see that God's work in us is not done? For once we had no choice. We were overwhelmed with sin, faithlessness and foolhardiness. Christ delivers us from the comfort of darkness to the choices of light. What are those choices? What did he tell us we ought to do and to be? More than anything we had ever imagined being before. Can you see with the eyes of your heart a stable with a cross upon it? Can you see the young Jesus talking with the men of God and telling them things that they had never heard before, preaching in the synagogue to the amazement and the fear of one and all? Can you see him telling them stories that confounded, confronted, convicted and forgave them? Can you see him as a mountain, stayed, unmovable, everlasting, silent? Can you see Jesus Christ like a morning star, an ocean that comes and goes ever ceasing as everlasting light?

Imagine if you will seeing with your eyes a church in Winston-Salem, the Lloyd Presbyterian Church in downtown. This ancient sanctuary does not have a stove, a phone or a refrigerator because it reduces the risk of vandalism. It is a hundred years old. It costs them most of their budget to replace a pane of stained glass. But these thirty-five people persist in believing that they are to be there, this black congregation with a white female minister. Oh yes, they are starting an afterschool program and they are looking for volunteers, especially those who speak Spanish. Can you see with the eyes of your heart God's light at Lloyd Presbyterian Church? Can you see a frail Pope of seventy-nine years beginning the Jubilee

year baptizing children in () Square. In Jubilee, well, most of us have not spent a lot of time in Leviticus to find out what it means. Obviously we cannot give back to the Indians all of the property that they owned at one time in this country. But what can we do with the Jubilee? We can take what has been given to us that we do not need including the excess energy we spend worrying about ourselves and give it away. Can you see that the light of God revealed in Jesus Christ disposes for us the discomfort, the fear, the uneasiness, the frightenedness of adolescence and of the aging? Can you see that even at Christmastime, funerals and weddings are joined at the hip? Can you see brokenness and wholeness? Can you see that Emanuel, God with us, is with us in all seasons whatever the circumstances? Can you see the chaplain at Mars Hill College and Kim Christman baptizing fifteen people of many ages in a river near a village in Cuba last Saturday? Can you see them ordaining a woman to the ministry of Jesus Christ in that same town? Can you see () in Calcutta? Can you see them here? Can you see in your own life what is there as light and hope? Can you see faculty and students who embrace the lab and the library and all the books and opportunities there again simply because they love to learn and do not know what they will do with that learning? Can you see that it is not what you do with what you have been given it is what you be with what you are given? Can you see Brian Johnson going as manager with the football team to Hawaii and then catching the red eye to Houston and eventually he winds up in Honduras to help build houses? For surely those people do not need anyone to tell them about Noah's flood, hopeless and helpless beyond measure but for those persons of many denominations who are there seeking to offer whatever help they can. Can you see two couples one of whom was a Greek scholar and his spouse deciding in the 1940s to build an interracial community in southwestern Georgia, self-sustaining community which has survived past their deaths and has given birthright to Habitat for Humanity?

Clarence () in his commentary on the book of Romans says that faith is betting your life that dreams can become (), and that what we see as events are already woven in the fabric of the unseen of God's history that Abraham and Sarah followed the unseen when they left their country and their certain birthright inheritance to go where their inheritance would be knowing not where it would be. He concludes by saying but for all those for whom the final price was paid often in martyrdom or some other form of sacrifice, all those who have come before us, our Jewish ancestors and our Christian brothers and sisters, they were not made complete. For God had something else in mind and it was that our lives and their lives would be joined together to bring about the unseen becoming real and visible to one and all.

The contemporary poet Wendell Berry is in my view a kind of a prophet of what we can see and what we can hope for. Love the Lord. Love the world. Love someone who does not deserve it. Take all you have and be poor. Laugh although you have considered all the facts. When it comes time to decide who and what you are plant sequoias. Say the forest is your

land. The trees that you neither planted nor will you ever be able to harvest. Say that the benefit and the prophet from that forest of sequoias are the leaves after they have rotted and become part of the (). Call that prophet. Denounce the government. Embrace the flag. Hope to live in a free republic for which it stands. When the politicians and the generals can figure out the motions of your mind lose it. Leave it as a false trail the way you did not go. Be like the fox making more tracks than are necessary. Some in the wrong direction. Can you see with your heart driven eyes his last command in his poem. Practice resurrection. END

Chapel Sermon 1/20/00

ED CHRISTMAN: He was short and round, not tall and angular as I had suspected. A dozen students and faculty sat with Dr. King in the Autumn Room, and one asked, Dr. King you say you are a law abiding person but you break the law. Quietly he responded, I respect the law and abide by it even if punishment. Therefore I have gone to jail many times. I've gone to jail on the principle that the law I broke was wrong. He spoke to an overflowing crowd, essentially white, but a few visitors can walk in. Even in 1962 he was talking about the relationship of gospel and goods and services and the poor and the rich. Security was tight. There were no incidents. He continued his journey down what he would call later the Jericho Road. The war in Vietnam began to take shape. It began to replace in terms of our goods and services, our emphasis as a nation, the war against poverty. Civil rights legislation had been passed. There was almost euphoria in the land for those who had wanted to see change and had made a connection as did Dr. King between Jesus' first sermon in Nazareth and his words to Peter at the inn, feed my sheep. They'd made a connection between the good news of the gospel, which was for all people of all nations, of all conditions.

As that war began to become the focal point of our lives as a nation and the great Satan communism loomed as the enemy of God and of America, Dr. King struggled he said for how he would respond. There were extremely radical groups alive and well in America. There were those just as alive and well who believed that he should and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Council should be certain that they build upon what President Johnson and others had wrought in the Congress. Voting Rights, people rights. We should build upon that. Leave the war alone. He did [proceed?].

But you can see even in '64 he had made this connection. The full gospel of Jesus Christ is for all persons in all conditions. So after a respite in Jamaica where he had once again reflected on what he should and would do, he returned and told his advisors much to their chagrin that he was going to look for an opportunity to speak out against the war. Why,

they say. Why would you risk all that we have on the table. Operation Breadbasket in Chicago has just begun. The Poor People's March on Washington is being organized. We need friends, not enemies. We need people who are on the margins, who are moderate in their support of the civil rights struggle. We need them on our side. You risk it all, Dr. King, and for what? There was to be a massive demonstration on the UN plaza in April, 1967. The North Vietnamese Liberation Front, the American Communist Party, all sorts of people would be there protesting the war in Vietnam. Dr. King characteristic of who he was said no to that invitation and returned to a place he called home. For he already spoken at the Riverside Church on the Upper West Side of Manhattan six times in the '60s, accepted the invitation to speak. For you see this was a former pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist church in Montgomery, Georgia. This was the son and grandson of a Baptist preacher. He was far more comfortable preaching a sermon about Vietnam and our need to get out of Vietnam, far more comfortable preaching it there at the Riverside Church. If you've ever been to Duke Chapel you have some idea of this majestic, powerfully beautiful place.

He said, I cannot remain silent any longer. To remain silent is to betray my calling as a minister. He argued I think persuasively that it was the poor white and black people in this country who were fighting that war because they were not in school and they had no way to get a deferment. They were suffering because the efforts to build up the possibilities for the poor were now in Vietnam. He had studied the history of that conflict, how the French had wanted to leave and in fact had almost completely left and the country was to declare their independence. There was actually the Geneva Treaty of 1954, which presumably we would abide by, but which we did not because the specter of the beast of communism was so great for many Americans that we encouraged the French to stay and then we took their place. The rest is a sad, sad sordid story of our history and our involvement in a way that we should not have been. At least that was King's interpretation.

So he said it is time to end the war. It is time to come home. It is time to pay reparations. It is time to make common cause with the revolution, which is not communist, but if you had pressed him he would have said it was Christian. People all over the world have a right to vote and to eat and to have shirts and shoes and an education. That was a part of his Christian religion.

When he finished, what did his advisors and what did the media say the next day? His words were reckless born out of ignorance. He was flamboyant. He was incendiary. His words bordered on treason. Those were not just the words of the media pundits. Those were the words of Jackie Robinson and the president of the NAACP. Those were the words of his friends who loved him and cared for him and were prepared to make personal sacrifices on behalf of the movement, but they

really could not understand. Perhaps he understood that the role of one that some of us would call a twentieth century prophet is not to be understood in the sense of being right. It is to be understood in terms of his goal and his objective.

One year later to the day he was assassinated. Shortly after viewing the memorial service or services that went on almost all Sunday, an Easter Sunday, a professor at Wake Forest said to me, Chaplain I don't understand. What are all those preachers doing talking about Dr. King? I said () you must understand. This is a Christian minister. He is not a civil rights leader. That's too narrow a focus. Of course, he won the Nobel Peace Prize. But through all of his experiences he seemed to understand that there was a connection between the good news of the gospel and the kingdom of God and how it relates to one another. So he said to us in that famous sermon at Riverside Church, all religions find common soil in the gospel of John. Those who love the Lord know God, and they love one another, and those who do not do not know God and do not love God and God does not know them. All religions share this common hope, this common dream, this common vision, and of course you remember why he was in Memphis. He was there because the garbage workers strike was languishing. It had been going on for months. It would appear that they were going to lose their modest claim for working conditions and a living wage. "I have been to the mountaintop. I have seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you." But there was no question the night before when he preached his last sermon that we were going to get beyond Vietnam. We were going to get beyond the garbage strike. We would find a way to be with God's people.

Now what is it that we do and how do we respond? Years later what did we individually understand about the calling of Jesus Christ to love one another in this very community, in this room, in relationship to people we know and those that we like and those that we dislike. Oh by the grace of God may we make a fundamental distinction now and forever between liking people and loving them. What did we personally do? Do we have any excuse as those who have been graced beyond our virtue, not to somehow make a connection as did Dr. King. As an institution what connections with his vision do we make? We say pro humanitate. Our motto. If we look a little more carefully at the seal, we might understand that Chi Rho is the center of the seal and that the rays of light downward toward pro humanitate tells us who we are, a reckless, dangerous, imprudent, prophetic way to live. Can we do that as an institution or will we live by the law of reason and prudence and moderation as I have done?

Last year Maya Angelou read the incredible unforgettable letter from the Birmingham jail in which Dr. King said explicitly, it is not the Klan that is my enemy. It is you moderate Christian ministers who are my enemy. By the grace of God hear that. How can we act upon it? Let us pray. After the prayer we will led by Chi Rho sing a capella "We Shall Overcome" as written in your program. As you pray hear these words from Dr. King's Riverside Church sermon. "We must move past

indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace. In a world that now borders at our own door. If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, strength without (). Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter but beautiful struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the children of God. Our brothers and sisters everywhere await our response. Shall we say the odds are too great. Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard. Will our message be that the forces of life in America militate against their arrival as full men and women. But shall we send to them all our deepest regrets. Or will there be another message of longing, of hope, of solidarity, a commitment to the cause whatever it costs. The choice is ours. Though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history. Amen. END

Chapel Sermon 4/26/01

ED CHRISTMAN: Are you afraid to make a promise? Are you afraid to break a promise? Are you afraid to tell the truth? Are you afraid to tell a lie? Are you afraid to have an opinion about things that matter or are you only silent? Are you afraid in class or in the residence hall to just burst out with an opinion and nail it and know that you have taken the discussion to another level? Or are you just plain and simply afraid? Now when on those rare occasions that we seem to know who we are and what we are about and when we do lift others up with us, that's awesome.

Let's look at an awesome scene. Jesus and his disciples the sea of Tiberius, they had gone fishing and they returned. But they won't say anything. They know who it is. Yet they say nothing. The fire, the fish, the fear and the faith were all there. Jesus offers them a meal. Is this just another day at dawn when pink and yellow and orange stripes come across their faces in the midst of the dark, just another God given day. Or is this the first day of a new creation? Would Peter remember this day. Peter who had been right and wrong simultaneously who had burst out with his opinions and his ideas and they turned and would walk away. Peter who was brave and a coward at the same time. Peter who perhaps had less knowledge of the real world or of academia than others so that he might have even stammered a bit in his speech because he was ashamed and because he was afraid. Peter, do you love me more than these things and these people? Your fishing buddies, do you love me more than any of these people or any of these things, I mean your fishing gear, Peter, and all the things that we seem to accumulate and build up like giant castles only to know in our heart that they will crash down around our heads as surely as the rain falls. Peter, do you love me more than these? Yes, Lord. Tend my sheep, Peter. Look after the broken

hearted, those broken in spirit. Look after the children and the orphans. Look after the sick and the homeless and the prisoners. Look after those who have nothing. Look after those who have lost all hope. Tend my sheep Peter. Oh yes Lord. Peter, do you mean that you will tend my sheep even if you have to deny your brother, your family, your friends, even if you have to deny all that you've ever known and believed? Is that what you mean Peter that you will deny all that has been if that's what it means to tend my little children, my sheep. Peter paused a moment. He blinks his eyes and moistened his lips and turned his head slightly. Yes, Lord. I will feed your sheep, those that are tattered and torn, those whose lives are incomplete. Yes Lord. Tend to the sheep. Jesus said, Peter, you have a tattered and torn life. You who hid in the shadows and cursed my very name. Are you going to tend my sheep if it means denying your own life? The pond was still. You could barely hear the water up against the land. You could barely see the smoke from that fire. You could hear, no doubt, the pounding hearts. Peter looked at Jesus. He said yes, Lord. I love you this much, stretching out his arms as far as he could. Jesus hugged him and kissed him. In almost total silence they doused the fire. They picked up all their fishing gear, and one by one they said, Lord, we want to go fishing with you. Are you ready to go fishing with Jesus? Am I ready to go? Are we ready to go fishing with the Lord? END

Chapel Sermon 8/30/01

ED CHRISTMAN: I wonder as I wander out under the sky, do I see God flying by. I wonder as I breathe in, breathe out. What is God all about? I wonder in the midst of all my fears, is God near? I wonder as I wander and see the farthest star. Is God really that far? I wonder as I wander out under the sky who is God, you and I?

The scene is breakfast. A youngster preparing for school, parent is busy with the eggs. The youngster is contemplating the cereal bowl. Let's say it's Monday that the youngster was in Sunday school the day before. Mama, is God everywhere? Yes, yes. God is everywhere. Is God in this room? Yes, yes. God is here in this room. With a twinkle in the eye, is God in this cereal bowl? Oh yes, (). [laughter] In our limited knowledge of ourselves and of God how often as children and adults do we assume that we have God in our creeds, in our doctrines, in our experience. We've got God. We can share God, and by the grace of God we will and I hope we shall. But what is this grace?

Sandlot football, a block and a half from my house was very democratic. There weren't too many people to play after all. So skinny four-eyed people, that is those of us who wore glasses and had white hair, we got to play. Now the difficulty that I had you see was catching the ball from the center. It was well known that I could throw that pigskin () with a spiral. So we only had one play when I was trying to be quarterback. Okay, guys. Hit the man in front of you and go

long. I would throw that pigskin as far as I could with no idea who might catch it. [laughter] God is that graceful. God loves all people tall and short, fat and thin or whatever race, creed or condition. God's grace is as expansive as the ocean coming in time after time after time and washing over us relentlessly, endlessly, seeking to give us a sense of purpose in our lives.

Now in our condition this bright joyful morning you might think the chaplain is a bit somber when he says I'm wearing a suit not just because I'm in chapel but because at one o'clock I will be involved in a memorial service. You say oh the person was eighty, three score and ten, four score if they are strong of faith. He died peacefully at home in the assurance of his faith, that he planned the service. Tomorrow another person not quite his age will also succumb to the evil shall we say of cancer. She too died in peace at home with her family and hospice care. Well, Chaplain why are you telling this? I'm telling you this because there are no guarantees about how long life will last by the grace of God. For many of you Bill Starling read your applications and approved your admission to this school. One day early this summer in the midst of his work, he slumped over in a chair and shortly after he reached the hospital, he died. Yes, recent graduates and students have died of cancer and airplane and car crashes and one died as an allergic reaction to peanut oil. God's grace extends to us all. In our gratitude we teach ourselves to believe that everyday is God's gift of gratitude for us to love and serve God in every way we can so that God's grace will pierce our heart () and melt our fears and give us hope.

This stole is hope. Oh it's beautiful and hand sewn. But that's not its beauty. I wear it as a reminder that the person who gave it to me was to have been married in this chapel and her spouse intended didn't show up. When she went to Jerusalem, she said Chaplain, I want you in the future to have something beautiful to wear for weddings and for memorial services, whatever. Oh God in the midst of death and pain does hope really remain? The scripture says yes. It really, really remains.

In our labor and in our leisure, whether we are twenty or eighty, God persistently loves us and calls us. Did you hear the strangeness of that passage? Isaiah says come on all of you and eat for the grace of God thy bread and wine without any money. Now what kind of marketing sense is that? Well, see what I tell you somehow is that the price had already been paid in Jesus Christ. If that doesn't give us pause to the measure of gratitude and how we relate to one another, how we relate to the opportunity to study and to learn, then somehow we have missed the point. God is not in any bowl, in any one place. God is in us as we seek to be God's thankful people. This place and all of its history is a gift to you and me, and we measure our gratitude in how we serve one another and ourselves as a community, knit together by the grace of God.

If God is God, is he always here? If God is God, is God always far? Is he nearer than the breath we breathe and farther than the distant star? Is God's grace in us? By the grace of God, God is and he will be eternal grateful whether it is

three score and ten or only one score of years, we shall give to others what has been given to us. The second scripture was dramatically clear. What an extraordinary book? What an marvelous drama the book of Revelations. Full of images that we can't really embrace very well, but it concludes by saying and I will wipe away every tear from their eye. No more sorrow. No more pain. No more death, all things new. I will give to each of you the water of everlasting. Amen. END

Chapel Sermon 1/31/02

ED CHRISTMAN: God's grace is as wild as a waterfall that you can see and hear and not know its full consequences. Adam and Eve broke the honor code. Yet God did not punish them ultimately for he gave them children, Cain and Abel. But Cain in order to gain an advantage killed his brother Abel. Wild God allowed Cain and his spouse to have children. One of them was Jacob and Jacob [saw?] his brother's birthright and Esau was so hungry that he sold his soul for some supper. Jacob was so afraid that Esau was going to come and kill him that he was prepared one dark night to meet his brother. We don't know who he met. It was a dark figure and a long wrestling match in which he was about to survive if not prevail, and then suddenly he was touched in a vital place like on his thigh and left with a limp for the rest of his life. He and Esau were reconciled. Abraham gave his wife to a pharaoh because he was afraid if she was seen as his wife he would be killed and so he passed her off as his sister. Then in the wildness of God Sarah later gave birth to a child and his name became legendary not because he was so great but because his alleged would be sacrifice turned out to be only a test of Abraham's faith.

The scholar Saul made at least 1400 on the SAT, multi-lingual in two difficult languages. He was a zealot for the Lord and he holds the coat of those who are going to stone Steven the Christian. He's on his way to Damascus to kill more Christians when he is blinded by a voice and the wildness of God's questions. Why do you persecute me Saul? With a changed name and a changed purpose he plants the church of Jesus Christ all over the known world, suffering every abuse and every risk that is possible. But he winds up at the very end of his monumental work on grace and goodness and power and justice, book of Romans. He concludes it not with some theological exposition but by giving thanks for those who had nurtured and served him, giving thanks for the individuals and the families. There are at least thirty-eight we can name in that book, in that chapter, gratitude for God's grace.

Oh and there was this old man. You see when Cain's descendants took advantage of their freedom to the extent that we could read about them at the checkout counter in those newsmagazines we see there with all those racy and lurid tales. Cain's descendants had topped all of that. God said, and it doesn't make sense to hear this from God, and God was sorry that he had made human beings. God repented of his creation. You don't believe that, do you? It was in Genesis.

Then the wildest of God's grace is that he says, () that no one had found favor with God. Noah in a later version were ever to capture what he means by the gratitude that he was to feel for what God had done. In a later writing it says I thank thee Lord both loud and still that shows to me such great good will and spareth me as mine to kill. Now I truly (). I shall fulfill and ever work they holy will that with this grace has saved me from ill, me, for all mankind. ()

Don't forget our friend Peter. I like Peter because he could do things with his hands. He had no degrees except in fishing and impulsiveness. Peter you see was called Satan by heathens when he tried to interpose himself before God's eventual presence in Jerusalem in Jesus and crucifixion. And this is the very person who cursed Jesus' name and denied knowing him the night before he was crucified. The wildness of God is that Peter is the one who then becomes part of the two-pronged effort of Paul and Peter to establish the church of Jesus Christ and to declare in the presence of Gentiles and Jews that God is no respecter of persons and that this Roman captain of the guard Cornelius is as subject to the grace of God as anyone else. Gratitude and gratitude () for what he was asked. Peter do you love me? Then go feed my sheep. You see Peter was a little dull so it took him three times. That's exactly what (). What did we do in life with the gratitude that has been shown to us by family and friends?

How do you not know that you have been loved and raised by others beyond your virtue? Would you believe a student at Wake Forest in his major flunked a course and had to take it over and managed some kind of decent grade and then turned around to the same professor that had flunked her and said what a great teacher. This is a great teacher. Why is it that you stay in the lab longer? Why is it that you study harder if it is not because you have been given an opportunity, and the gratitude is a measure of the grace beyond your known virtue.

A professor goes with a group of students to Honduras. He comes back and he says I have never worked with disadvantaged people. I have never worked with handicapped, disabled children. I wasn't prepared for that. What he said in his email is the same thing the catholic community students said last week, two weeks ago and the students from the Volunteer Service Corps will say next week. What is the one thing they'll say? I received more than I gave. God's wildness of grace that gives us opportunity means that we receive more than we were given. At another school a group went to Cuba and they carried these boxes of medicines and things that these people needed. It was a church about a fourth, the building itself was a fourth the size of this one. They got to Havana and the government took all their stuff. They were so angry and underneath their anger was their fear. What is it we're going to say to these people when we get there? What are we bringing so that we can give them something so they can thank us? When they got there, they found that what they had

brought was themselves. That was the only thing that the people welcoming them. They weren't looking for medicine. They were looking for people to love them and would care for them.

So who here is going to study inside and outside the box? Who is going to continue to go to the prison and lift those prisoners up? Who is going to continue to go to Old Town School and elsewhere working with the children like Sammy and Carrie have done. Who is going to do that? Are you doing it if you do out of the sheer gratitude that you feel somehow I've got to pay back the wildness of God in what I do? Who is going to write the music for the hymns that would be sung in this place and other places while your grandchildren? Who is going to write the lyrics to go with that music that will lift the soul and turn the inside out so that we'll know God's grace is wild enough? If it's wild enough to take care of fraudulent people, murderers, cowards, adulterers, surely, surely God's grace covers our sins and saves us in gratitude. That the waterfall of God's grace will continue to give us life and hope and a sense of purpose that goes beyond words. God is wild. He calls us to be wild enough to think inside and outside the box to give hope to those who do not have it and to give ourselves a sense of purpose regardless of our limitations, regardless of what we don't know about our future. Our future is to profess our faith and how we deal with other persons. That is our order. That is our command. I invite you to heed the voice of the spirit. Let us stand as we sing our closing hymn. END

Chapel Sermon 4/18/02

ED CHRISTMAN: Amos did not see himself as a prophet, and he said, I'm just a boy, maybe old enough to go to college. I don't know how to speak. God, just as God often does, ignored what he said. He said, well, I'll give you a message and then I'll ask you a question. Amos, what do you see? I see a boiling pot in Jerusalem.

Isaiah went to a lovefeast or something very much like it. A lot of light, a lot of beautiful sounds. Candles lit, held high, Joy to the world, the Lord has come. I've even seen a student leave the chapel on a cold windy night holding that candle protecting the light with their hand as if they could do that. When Isaiah heard God's call, here I Lord. Send me. Not knowing the message would be a message of judgment upon the people. But this is the same person who also speaks about wonderful counselor, mighty God, king of kings. Somehow he was willing to take the message once his mind was had been opened and he saw in his heart.

John's gospel is about nothing but darkness and light. You can just pretty well lay aside everything else that's there. Light and life are put together. Darkness and sin are put together. You are the light of the world. The city set on the hill cannot be hid. Neither do we put our light under a bushel but on a lamp stand for everyone to see. John wants to make it

clear. He said graces pile up on top of grace, and God so loved the world he gave his only son. The disciples had a hard time seeing that with the eyes of the Lord. When Peter had been there, he had seen miracles like the one Misty described to us. He had heard the message. He was there () with the beatitudes spoken out loudly and poignantly right to the heart of everyone. So Jesus said the only way this journey is finished is with my crucifixion. We could stand right in the face of the master. He said no. Jesus calls Peter Satan. But of course later Peter's eyes are opened and he says God is no respecter of persons. God loves the Gentiles and the Jews, the Roman soldiers as well as the peasants who suffer under their cruel treatment.

There was Saul, intellectual, the equivalent of a Ph.D. in theology, holding the coats of those stoning (). In other words he was an accessory before and after the fact. He was a murderer, but one of Jesus' saints, and he was on his way to get some more Christians in Damascus when you know the story. Yes, John's gospel is full of (), and you have to receive sight so Paul receives sight.

Now in this marvelous short story we find that everyone is on the same level plane, the plane of sin, death and blindness. God in Christ uses the physical infirmity of one young person to tell us the truth, the final truth. Look at how this young man responds. Look at how his parents respond. There are some people right now in housing who would hope that parents would take the same attitude of indifference and run for cover. Well, he thought it was enough to speak for himself, afraid, afraid to deal with the brightness of this miracle. The good people, sisters and brothers, you and me, Pharisees. Trying to figure everything out. We have an explanation for every jot and tittle.

This, this olive-skinned man with his smelly fisherman friends and these women of ill repute and that wretched tax collector, who are they? He comes from the backside of nowhere (). What's he doing on the Sabbath? He's healing a blind person. The blind person said he's a prophet. They do not know what to do especially when the blind person now has infinite sight. Hey, he asks so many questions. He must want to join the Jesus [band?]. That was too much.

Indeed the light that Jesus Christ puts before us is often too much for us, isn't it? Makes too many demands. Calls upon us to follow the heart and let the head figure out the reasons later. I have said that to some parents about the decisions their sons and daughters were making about college and their countenance falls. What do you mean follow their heart? I said, well, it may not work out, but there have been students who have gotten out of their car right in this parking lot and come see the campus. They walk up on the Quad, whether there was mathematical toilet paper or football toilet paper or none at all. They walked up to the quad and walked around and said okay. What do you mean okay? Let's go home. What do you mean? We just got here. I know, but this is where I'm coming to school. How do you factor in the grace

of God's light that overcomes our darkness unless it is an act of faith more than we could ever imagine but for the grace of God that speaks to us in so many countless ways.

What are the seniors going to take with them from here this day and these four years? What will they remember? One senior I can tell you will remember a day on Davis Field about a month ago. Brooke Watson's father was killed in an airplane crash and a skinny skeleton of a white maple tree was planted. It's about eight feet tall. This young woman said we will come back and see this tree. I found out it will be seventy feet with a crest of green thirty-five feet across except in the fall when it will look like Moses' burning bush of red and yellow. We will come back and see this tree. () was pretty amazing. I wasn't prepared. She said and our children's children will see this tree. Ooh. Now John's gospel is getting to us, isn't it? We see that which we do not expect to see. We see that which we cannot make happen. We hope for what we do not see and follow our hearts to whatever tasks there are. Lord knows there are boiling pots in Jerusalem and in Winston-Salem. Lord knows we need persons whose vocation is not a job. It is doing what God tells us to do even if it frightens us. In the final analysis hear the words of the twentieth century prophet who lives where you can make prophesy I think a little easier, eastern Kentucky. It's a stark region and the prophet says among other things. When the politicos and the generals can predict the motions of your mind, lose it. Be like the foxes. Make false trails, some in the wrong direction. Practice resurrection. END

Samuel Wait Program (Orientation) 8/23/02

ED CHRISTMAN: Music of pots and pans. We had sung for our supper. But the unforgettable time was Anna Eliza being sick and us leaving our dearly beloved four-year-old with strangers to take care of.

Now we had to get a charter. It was proposed on the basis of all the support we could gain, but there was opposition. Some of the Baptists said, if God wants a school, if God wants a bunch of preachers, he'll just raise them up. Besides University of North Carolina is part Episcopalian anyway. The vote was tied until William D. Moseley of Lenoir Speaker of the House, broke the tie and the Wake Forest Manual Labor Institute was founded.

Now why Wake Forest for a name? The land we were going to secure was in Wake County, near Raleigh. That entire region was simply a forest of trees. Providentially Calvin Jones a physician had 605 acres to sell along with a house and former slave quarters because he was moving his practice to Tennessee. The asking price for this expanse of land, these

buildings and this very elegant house was twenty-five hundred dollars. But seeing the intensity and commitment of the people who wanted to start the school, he cut the price to two thousand dollars.

So on a balmy February day in 1834 we welcomed sixteen students, and during the year there were seventy-two who came. The first one John Crenshaw. He brought his twenty-five dollar deposit toward his sixty-dollar tuition. He brought an ax and a hoe because [laughter] this was a manual labor institute. We were going to have the opportunity to try and grow our own food. Oh yes, the food cost four dollars and fifty cents a month. One of the things that I helped prepare was called hodgepodge pudding. I doubt that recipe has survived or any of those cornshuck mattresses in those former slave quarters where the students stayed. No matter. We might say that we were going to hoe potatoes and learn Latin. Someone might say well, which is it you have a potato picking bunch of preachers or a preaching bunch of potato pickers. Whichever it was, it didn't work out. The manual labor plan failed.

We rechartered Wake Forest College in 1838. We were off to a slow but steady beginning, and I passed the reins on to a person who had gone to Wake Forest, Manley Wingate, who this building right back here is named for him. He began to improve the faculty, gain more students. Things were going rather well, but the clouds of war appeared. Most all of the students left and joined the Confederate Army, and sadly most all of the money left too. It had been invested in Confederate bonds. The school closed. The only person left there in this rather wild place was Manley Wingate. As the story goes, a former student came back to this place and found the president and said, Mr. President, are you going to reopen the school? Wingate said, "The torch of truth has been lighted in this wild forest, and by the grace of God it will never go out." Now some other people must've believed that too because the faculty came back and often they weren't paid. The students came back and they didn't have hardly anything with which to pay for an education. But the spirit of the place was embodied in a man named Denmark. He assumed there'd be loan funds for college students. There weren't any at Wake Forest or at any other school in the country. Now what did he do? He starts a loan fund. Nickel and dime out of his own pocket, out of his classmate's pockets, from the faculty, maybe from a few people in the town. No matter. One hundred and twenty-seven years later the Denmark loan fund is still helping students in school.

When it came time to choose a successor to President Wingate, the trustees had a problem. Three people had turned them down. Taylor was a philosophy professor. How would you like to be the fourth choice for president? Didn't bother him at all. He had been overseas and had seen some beautiful gardens, and he decided it should be a place of beauty. He had a confederate that believed the same things. His name was Tom Jeffries, a former slave and the son of slaves. Dr. Tom, as he was called, was also rather good at horticulture. He and President Taylor and no doubt some of the students

planted over three hundred trees and numerous shrubs. There were so many trees on the campus that were magnolia that the school newspaper's masthead said, "Covers the campus like the magnolias". But physical beauty was not enough for Dr. Taylor. He had another vision. It was a vision of a law school and of a medical school. He couldn't possibly have seen could he where that was taking us. Oh yes, intercollegiate athletics began in North Carolina during his administration, and of course it was Wake Forest versus Carolina. And of course we won. The score was six to four.

His successor was a former biology teacher, a graduate of Wake Forest who had gone to Berlin to study about the wonders of the world, a devout Christian who was later elected president of the Baptist State Convention and was the first person to ask any student, invite any student to look at God's world through a microscope at a southern school. He taught evolution. That did not make him overly popular in some circles. But Dr. Poteat was able to defend his teaching as God's method of bringing us into this world. He was a short round man who loved to wear a red tie, and they wrote a song, "Billy with the Red Necktie". He would likely engage a student in any circumstance with a question and I will tell you that if you could manage to appropriate, and I don't recommend you do this, the paramecium drawings of his, I believe in Winston Hall, you'd make an A. Now something else occurred during his administration. He and his sister designed the seal, which is everywhere on our campus. Christos, Chi-Rho in the center with rays of light pointing toward all human kind. This very polite name of Wake Forest athletic teams, the Wake Forest Deacons, sports publicity editor picked up a copy of a paper from some town after a Saturday game in which Wake Forest had played according to the report with great ferocity. They had played like demons, and the sports publicity man at Wake Forest, yes, we're no longer the Deacons. We are the Demon Deacons. [shouts and applause from audience] Now Dr. Taylor as I said could not have imagined what starting a two-year medical program in 1902 would mean. I understand there will be a hundredth anniversary, a centennial celebration, of that event this fall. He couldn't have realized that.

Nor could he have realized that the person who succeeded him as president, Thurmond D. Kitchin who had been the dean of the two-year program would now be the president at the very time that Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem was looking for that absolutely necessary teaching component and said to Wake Forest and to Thurmond Kitchin, why don't we turn this two year program of yours and Wake Forest to a four-year medical school in Winston-Salem. That's what happened in 1941. How could anybody have realized until then that maybe, just maybe the college would follow? So the medical school was established. The Baptists received an invitation to come to Winston-Salem from the Reynolds Foundation, which of course grew out of the Reynolds Tobacco Company. Twelve million dollars endowment, \$360,000 operating expense, 600-acres of land, generous offer. Of course you need to raise the twenty million dollars for the buildings. Kitchin knew that his

presidency had gotten through a great deal. He had had fires to cope with, students going off to war, a depression, the Duke and Wake Forest law schools had to combine that each would survive. Then he did one other thing in order to survive, he invited women to come to Wake Forest. [shouts from audience] Now that was supposed to be a temporary measure, but as I observe it represents a permanent path for the student body.

But who was going to pick up the mantle of the school. His name was Harold Tribble, and he was trained as a theologian, and he became the president of Andover-Newton Theological School in Boston. He was our Moses because after the Baptist State Convention had decided overwhelming to accept this offer, then it came time to put up the money, and people in eastern North Carolina realized what they were quote losing. So some people didn't want the move to take place. Oh yes, Dr. Tribble also believed that no athletic coach in this case a very popular football coach should make more than the faculty. So whether he quit or he was fired, it's irrelevant. Dr. Tribble was burned in effigy. It didn't bother him too much. He brought the president of the United States here for the ground breaking, and he continued his labor and preparation for the school to move. In 1956 we came to Winston-Salem to the hills of Forsyth from the forest of Wake. Dr. Tribble was the president when desegregation occurred. He was present when ten of our students and twelve from Winston-Salem State sat in at a lunch counter and were arrested. He was president when although the trustees resisted the students attempt to bring qualified African Americans to the student body, students did an end run. They went to Africa and found a student who was eminently qualified academically and was the product of Christian missions. That was a very swift move. What were the trustees going to do as trustees of a Baptist school believing in missions to turn down the product of missions? Ed Reynolds came and succeeded in college, in divinity school, in the London School of African and Oriental Studies and became a deputy director after a distinguished career teaching, a deputy director of the overseas program of all the California schools, maybe thirty-five or forty schools and four thousand students a year. Dr. Tribble believed in improving salaries and enhancing the library. He was also the president when one student who was Moravian said, the tradition of my church ought to be shared with the entire student body. The outcome of that is that on the first Sunday in December after Thanksgiving break this chapel will be full. Simple meal of bun and coffee and a candle which is lit, the beeswax candle signifying the purity of Christ, the sacrifice and the light of the world. I'll be here. I hope you will because we also take up a collection as people leave and we give it to those who need it more than we. But Dr. Tribble's dream was that Wake Forest become a university. That dream came true in his last year, 1967.

His successor was a native-born Indian American from Oklahoma. James Round Scales envisioned an overseas program. He envisioned interfaith dialogue through the ecumenical institute. He convened a convocation of prayer during

Vietnam. That was a turbulent time too. Some campus ministers and some students made crosses and lined the entranceway to the campus, but they were taken by somebody but I got a call as I understand it or someone did as to where those crosses were. They were reassembled right up here where North dorm is for the most part, row upon row like a Flanders field. Each cross had the name of a North Carolinian who had died in Vietnam. Dr. Scales believed that learning included the arts, hence the Scales Fine Arts Center. Campus ministry expanded while he was president.

His successor was a builder. Thomas K. Hearn had to first renovate existing buildings and then build those that we needed for our expanded program, larger student body and graduate work. He also believed in the overseas program, and he participated in the dedication of campus ministry space in Kitchin Residence Hall. He also launched the plan for the class of the year 2000 that put laptops in your hands. He knew too that Charles Taylor had believed in the beauty of a place, making it a better place to learn. He has given considerable energy to that purpose.

Now what is your purpose? Do you want to hold the torch of truth high and by the grace of God never let it go out? Do you want to be a teacher here? Do you want to be a dean or a college president? What do you want to be by the grace of almighty God? Someone has said that your vocation and our vocation and the vocation of an institution is to find out where the world's deepest needs and our deepest desires come together. Then you'll find out later how to earn a living. So what is to be your vocation? What indebtedness do you feel towards the past? Will you gain any inspiration if sometime during your four years you journey the two hours to the old campus and see that original house with the hodgepodge pudding memories there that's been made into an elegant facility that captures much of the history of the school. Will you do that? You can visit Shorty's and get one of his hot dogs if you like. Will you do those things which will help you go deeper into who you are and who we ought to be? For sisters and brothers, that place there is holy ground. This place here is holy ground. You are holy, made in the image of God.

When Sarah and I would travel those long, long, dark roads that were not really roads, we were often discouraged and depressed. Music was our medication and we would sing. One of our favorites of course includes a verse that perhaps tells us who we are and who we ought to be. [singing] "Through many dangers, toils and snares, we have already come. 'Tis grace has brought us safe thus far. And grace will lead us on." END

Chapel Sermon 8/29/02

ED CHRISTMAN: Practice hospitality until it becomes a way of life. Hear what it is that God has said to us. You are the sons and daughters of cross and resurrection. What does that mean? If it does not mean to care not only for yourself but for

others. Take note of the world around you, its pretense, its superficiality, its shortsightedness, its anger, its hostility. The scripture says, be ye transformed with the renewal of your mind, your heart and your spirit, putting away those things which are of this world and embracing that which the cross and the resurrection offer unto us. The scripture says in Romans that we are not thought of as individuals who are being transformed. We are transformed as a community. When one suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. We are called to weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh. Now hear this. We are not to repay evil with evil. We are to repay evil with good. God will deal with and punish wrongdoers. Ours is to somehow miraculously lay aside our pretense of who we think we are and know who we are called to be, a community of people of various and sundry gifts.

Recently I spoke to the freshman football team and I was searching for a scripture and I found it. In Corinthians Paul speaks about one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body with many parts including the unseen part. Who do you think freshman football players are if they are not the unseen parts? Yet the scripture says with good news and gusto but the unseen parts are as worthy of God's grace and gifts as are all the other. For it is not the parts but it is the whole. So we weep with those who weep. We rejoice with those who rejoice. Yes, and we feed and give drink to enemies. That doesn't mean we have to like them. It means that we have to heed God's calling in Jesus Christ to love our enemies as our friends for in so doing we hope for them. We care for them. We imagine that which is not yet, and we believe in the power that in hoping for and loving and caring for others we indeed are caring for ourselves. Therefore, our separate towns are mysteriously and miraculously brought together. They are going together in this cross which was first planted in God's holy ground. (). Every breath we breathe is holy, and it is that with which we are in common with all other creatures, the very breath of God. Those arms are reaching out generation to generation. For from the time of Paul nearly two thousand years ago these words have been internalized, be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind, your heart and your soul into a community of faith where if one suffers we do all suffer. It is in those persons who have preceded us, most of whom we do not know, mystical presences for nearly two thousand years who have somehow come together. They teach and preach; they heal; they help; they argue; they discuss. But it is all in the context of faithful. We come closer to ourselves and we remember families and friends, and youth fellowships and community groups that have helped make us diligent and steadfast in prayer. Yet it has been our occasion to laugh and to be nurtured and to cry and to grieve, but it is together that we so live and move and have our (). It is in that holiness that is of God, and therefore is of us. It asks us and what is it that you will do and what is it that you will be?

Two years ago at the Preschool Conference on the last morning, a student presented her reflection on the twenty-third Psalm. It was her gift to us. It is my gift to you on her behalf. I did not have to find her and ask her permission. The persons who have come before us, the families, the friends, the church people who have sought to be one Lord, one faith, one baptism, were those realities because of who they were. They were unconcerned about whether what they said or did were written down or not. Thanks be to God much of it was written as is in the case of what Katie read this morning. So in order to help make the distance, the short journey backwards, I request that you close your eyes and hear these words from the peer of some of you and a recent ancestor of us all. The Lord is my shepherd, yet I want. He leads me by tranquil streams that soon surge and swell in the wake of my uncertain tide. I walk the dark valley unable to see the infinite mountaintops that surround me. The Lord sends me a crook and staff. They appear in the form of loving people, heart turning music and boundless, natural beauty. Too often I turn away. He has set a feast in my honor, but somehow my invitation was unopened among the clutter of my life. I cannot understand the undeserved love that insists on anointing me. My faith is not quite blind enough. I do not want to accept the things that are beyond my comprehension. So I seek the divine with all too human eyes. Perhaps my true awakening will only come when I learn to walk with my eyes closed. Followed simply by the faithful love all the days of my life and when I finally awaken to this blindness, it is then I will find myself in a home of my Lord and God. Amen.

Yesterday I received an email from an RA in Bostwick. Chaplain, I want to read some of those names during the day of 9-11-2002. If there is anything else I can do, please let me know. Would you like for me to send a notice to all my residents? Then she says, thank you as if I had given her the gift of a possibility of giving to others and sharing in something which by the grace of God makes us a community. Be yet not transformed by what is around you or by the renewal of your heart and your mind, the gifts of your mind and your spirit and your hands helping, weeping, laughing, rejoicing or in so doing you give honor to the glory of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. END

Speech at Retirement Banquet 4/16/03

ED CHRISTMAN: It was a crisp cool day in mid-September in 1947. I had just gotten off the iron horse that had brought me from Jacksonville to Wake Forest where I had boarded the train the night before. I had with me a wardrobe trunk and one suitcase. As the train moved away from the station toward Austin or wherever, I looked across the street from the railroad platform in the town of Wake Forest. What did I see? I saw the steeple of the chapel rising up out of a forest of trees. I made my way in that direction because my room assignment--oh what people in residence life can do with words--room assignment? In a year when more veterans than mice were around, my assignment, sisters and brothers, my first room

metaphorically we might say was the basement of the chapel. I didn't have any roommates. I had bedmates. My wardrobe trunk and my suitcase, they were the perimeter of my room. In a couple of days with some horror I looked up, and one of my bedmate's bed was in the ceiling. It was time to move. By the grace of the good Lord I either found a registrar or someone in Wait, Wingate, Wait Chapel, no, Wait Hall, yeah, in Wait Hall, and they said there is a guy named Josey and he's got a barracks apartment, and I think he's still looking for some people. So I moved into the Josey Barracks, and I now have nine roommates. I was a happy camper because two or three of those gentlemen were members of the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity, and the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity allowed even freshmen from Florida to eat family-style from Monday morning through Saturday lunch. How much did it cost? Ten dollars and fifty cents, eat your heart out.

There's only time for one story. A couple of years later I was on my way to the cafeteria with Henry Miller, my Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity brother. We got to the cafeteria and we moved down the line and I got to the coffee place. There was nobody there. A new employee whose job was salads and desserts tried to help out in the absence by the grace of God. Jean wasn't trained in coffee. Eventually we got some cream, which I have since discounted, some cream and coffee in the cup, which she handed me with no saucer. She smiled and she laughed because she was very pretty. When I got to the table—I still know where that table is in that old cafeteria—I said to Henry Miller who's now my cardiologist—but that's another story—I said Henry I'm going to find out who that is. And I did. And we have celebrated last December fifty years of marriage. [applause] By the grace of God, Carolyn and Kim came to be a part of our family. Ronnie and Stan came to be our sons through our daughters. That too was the grace of God but don't we all know something of events that we had nothing to do with or only a small portion of a life shaped and lived. We know that. I know that because I never had a resume. Never needed a resume. This university has never needed a resume either if it operates by the grace of God.

Now I came to live as of 1956 when they moved to Winston-Salem, I came to live in Wingate Hall. I've studied a little bit about President Wingate. President Wingate is reported to have said--and I really don't care if he really said it because like so much of the scripture it's so true that the facts don't really matter. During the Civil War and I do think in fact this is an accurate reporting because after all it came from Pascal's history. During the close of Wake Forest, disheveled and in disarray, President Wingate still lived there. A former student came up to him and said, "Mr. President, are you going to reopen this school?" "The torch of truth has been lighted in this wild forest and by the grace of God it will never go out." Torch of truth. Lighted. For us. Have we been through fires and wars and controversies and a move? And yes, we've been through financial crunch time, but by the grace of God I submit to you, President Wingate was right. So I have decided that this wonderful gospel song can be refashioned ever so slightly and applied to us as the university. END OF SPEECH