Welcome and Occasion
adapted from an original reflection by Viki Matson
Read by Trudy Hawkins Stringer

Welcome faculty, staff, students, friends, and 2020 candidates for graduation. I am honored to celebrate this historic occasion with you, virtually.

This day is not at all what we expected it to be, and we lament that.

We are heartbroken that we cannot gather in close proximity with all the other human bodies that have been such a vital part of our experience at Vanderbilt.

We have sat shoulder to shoulder in classrooms, we have pored over texts together in the library and study sessions, we have broken bread together on so many occasions, we have laughed uproariously together and we have shared bitter tears with one another. We have played and danced and hugged one another with such regularity that these physical expressions have become part of the fiber which binds us to each other.

And today, of all days, those fibers of connection are not available to us, and we fervently lament that. This day is not at all what we expected it to be.

And yet here we are. The class of 2020 will still graduate. The formal part of our theological education has ended and we are finding ways to celebrate this tremendous milestone, even during a pandemic. Thankfully we can still see each other’s face and smile. We can hear each other speak and laugh. We can still delight in each other even if we are not together.

And together with the Psalmist we can still say, “God you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

Friends, welcome. May we together, enter this service with gratitude for all that we give and receive, all that we lament and celebrate, all that we have lost and gained. Amen!