

- And that is the subject for another sermon. (laughter) The presumption that we live in a very unique age which therefore, requires some very unique counsel because we are very unique people, it's simply put, not a very unique presumption. To help us frame this then I've taken as my text, a modest bit of enigmatic prose from Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. These words. For a wide door for effective work has been opened to me and there are many adversaries. That is not the sort of verse you would memorize in Sunday school nor is it so a verse that would be inscribed in Bibles presented to you, or written even in religious calendar art. It is rather obscure, enigmatic, eminently forgettable, the ideal subject for a sermon on occasion such as this. (laughter) Now if you can remember a few minutes ago, back to that chapter from Corinthians which I read to you, you may have wondered what on Earth is going on? And why here and why now? It seems one of those little business notes that Paul is always jotting off to his constituents a combination of homily, gossip, scolding, advice, and preaching much more like a collage of messages taped to the refrigerator door than a philosophical essay or a reasoned discourse. Well I ask you to forget the travel, forget about Macedonia, forget about the offering for the Saints at Jerusalem and even the advice concerning Timothy. Focus for a moment on that almost parenthetical statement that talks about a wide door for effective work. A wide door that the apostle believes has opened to him. And perhaps the most important word in the passage, and there are many adversaries. Note that the apostle says, "And there are many adversaries," rather than, "But there are many adversaries," or, "Unfortunately, there are many adversaries," or, "It's too bad that there are many adversaries." He doesn't say any of that. He says, "A wide door for effective work, "opportunity, has opened for me "and there are many adversaries," or obstacles, or difficulties. There are by definition, adversaries at the point of every opportunity. With every opportunity there comes adversity and if this is so, so to is the opposite. With adversity, there comes a necessity, opportunity. Saint Paul recognized that in some sense adversity was not the opposite of opportunity, it was the consequence of opportunity. He understood as so many of us do not that both opportunity and adversity are seasons of grace. They are together, a part of the normal ordinary business of living. And the university community especially as privileged University community as this one is, one frequently is brought up with the view that one has a ticket only to opportunity and a first class ticket at that. Somehow here, we the sifted few in Henry James' deliciously cynical phrase, "Pay these exorbitant fees, "and those of us who teach "are paid these pitiful salaries (laughter) "to be protected from adversity "of any sort." We are subsidized in the view that a carefree opportunity belongs to us as a right and that anything less than this is in the academic equivalent of sin, unfair. It is unfair, say some of you that your generation should inherit the threat of nuclear annihilation, thus, raining on your parade. It is unfair that the nations of the economy will make it likely that your standard of living will be lower than that of your parents. It is unfair that we cannot resolve the wrongs in Latin America, South Africa, the Middle East, or Northern Ireland, or downtown without undo inconvenience to ourselves. It is unfair that we should be kicked out of Duke just when we got to figure out how the place ran and could almost do it by ourselves. Indeed, the University education ought to teach one how to make the most of one's opportunities, but it is also engaged at it's best in the business of dealing with the adversity that comes with it. For nothing less than life itself is the business of learning. It was (mumbles) who in criticism of Hegel said, "He teaches you everything "you need to know in the world

"except how to live your life "and die your death." What a sad verdict on such a wise man. There will probably still be commencement orators across the land, who will continue to sound the trumpets of opportunity in technological terms. And will tell you that we are the able now to make better mouse traps, than we were last year. They will tell us we can do anything we want to do. They will give audiences such as you license to sing that grammar school taunt, anything you can do, I can do better. And because so many of you have been here so long, worked so hard, and paid out so much you will be tempted to believe these easy profits of easy progress. Now don't get me wrong, I do not despise progress, I am not a Luddite. I am not a member of the Amish community. I do not hold the view of the little ole lady from Dubuque who said that if God had intended man to fly he would not have invented the railroad. (laughter) No, I like my microwaves. I like the internal combustion engine. I like digital clocks and all the other marvelous products from Japan. (laughter) But I hope that neither you nor I will mistake these achievements and wonders for any thing more than what they really are. Means and diversions. Perhaps we need to remember Pharaoh's words, When in voting against the extension of the telegraph lines from Concord to Boston in 1847, he said, "All our progress "is but improved means to unimproved ends." We don't need to be chastened by anything quite so modest as the extension of the telegraph from Concord to Boston. The Challenger disaster in January may have delayed the exploration of outer space, but it may as well in that enigmatic way have accelerated the exploration of inner space. When the disaster revealed itself before our eyes, we were assured first that it was a terrible thing but some kind of technical or technological answer surely could be found to correct a technical or technological error. And once this had been detected, once we had found out what was wrong, we could correct the matter and there would be no loss to progress or to science despite the regrettable human loss. Our commentators were concerned for our children who watched this disaster on television. Concerned not that the children would be traumatized by death, they see that all of the time. That was nothing new. What they feared was that children would be traumatized by the failure of technology. Not the loss of life but the imperfection of the machine. And that was new. But now we are sadder and wiser. We know that at the heart of the shuttle failure was not technology as such, but as in all human things, there was at the heart of the enterprise, human failure. A lie here, a cover up there. The desire for NASA to push things through as quickly as possible. The need for the appearance of success at any cost. The unwillingness to entertain even the hypothesis of failure. The unwillingness to entertain adversity as a colleague of opportunity. Human error, not ignorance, not evil, but error, seems to be the culprit here and ambition for achievement at any cost. Fame, distinction, power, all of those things you have been taught to grab for so quickly, all of those things that from time in memorial, have deluded us into thinking ourselves wiser, and better than we are or can be. The opportunity for wide and effective work is great but often, more often than not, the adversaries that always accompany it are not only out there, and beyond, but rather within and very near indeed. There is an arrogance that comes with knowledge such as you and I possess and that arrogance my dear friends, is just as dangerous as ignorance and even moreso. There is also an arrogance that comes with virtue as well. And you who would be virtuous ought to pay heed to that danger. There is an aphorism that says, "A surplus of virtue is more dangerous "than a surplus of vice. "For a surplus of virtue is not subject to the constraints of conscience." Think of it, how much harm is done in the name of good? How much real wickedness is done by those who in the name or what they believe to be a just cause, will stop at nothing. University men and women are subject as few others are to the arrogance of knowledge and virtue. Thinking that all who disagree with you, are either stupid or wicked or both. One of the virtues of the world beyond these walls, is that you will not be permitted the uncontested luxury of either of these

options for long. It will be tempting even seductive to believe that the world today is now a very different place from what it was 25 or 50 or 100 years ago. And certainly there is no comparison with the world of Adam and Eve or even of Saint Paul. Happily we say, we are freed from all of those anxieties and ignorances. Our medieval academic costume and our medieval Ecclesiastical architecture and our Wesleyan piety are simply on a mental props for a brave show, for a brave new people and a brave new world. I rather think that this is a false even dangerous view. The world, I suggest, nuclear threat and all, is fundamentally the same as it is always been and so to for better or worse, are men and women. The same fears, hopes, weaknesses, and ambitions confront us as confronted our mothers and fathers, we are not so much different than they. Is it then not a source of some profound reassurance that the God who cared for them continues to care for us and that the gospel which was true for them continues to be true for you and for me as well. In the midst of all the discontinuities of life, that is the only continuity worth holding on to. And if that is true is it not one of the hopeful ironies of our time, that we should be prepared to enter a secular and crazy world by a service of prayers, hymns, and thanksgiving before the the altar of the living God. Not in the laboratory, not in the library, not on the fields of endeavor not in the rooms in which you have spent many hours, but in this place the temple of the living God. What encouraged Saint Paul to pass through that wide door for effective work, and to embrace the adversaries within and without, was the conviction that God in Jesus Christ was the same yesterday, today, and forever. No less a conviction than this would enable or empower him in the face of his own arrogance, and weakness, in the face of his own abysmal ignorance and profound temptation. Not only those adversaries within, but the opposition of many without and beyond. If there is continuity in the sin of the world, there is also continuity in the hope of the world and you now are part of that hope. You cannot act the part alone, and that is why all of you, scholars old and young find yourselves here today to receive the prayers and the blessings of the church. For some of you, this may seem just one more pious archaism in the midst of a Gothic quadrangle translated from 15th century Europe, to the glades of North Carolina. That, what has this you might well say, to do with me? Well a great deal. For the power of the Christian faith, the power of the faith that sustains you and nurtures you, does not depend upon whether you believe in God or not, but rather, it depends upon the glorious fact that God believes in you. Upon such a bold premise, is our church founded this University nourished and the hope of the world in you maintained. So are we asking you to be heroes, dare to be a Daniel, dare to be a Paul, as the old pious Sunday school song goes. Are we asking you to join the saints and the martyrs, the brightest and the best in the field of endeavor or in Wall Street, or wherever you hope you will be taken. I suggest not, with all due respect to you and to the heroic, we don't need one more heroic figure. Our prayer is that a Browning's Paracelsus who asks, "Make no more giants Lord, "but elevate the race." There is now open to each of you a wide and great door for effectual work, working in the world. And there are many adversaries as well, known and unknown to you. You cannot stay here. You cannot stay in this chapel. You must go and in the words of the spiritual, "I will go. "I shall go, "to see what the end will be." And as you go, may God go before you, behind you, within you, and forever with you. Amen. (organ plays) (choir sings)

- Let us unite in this historic confession of the Christian faith, I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord who is conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered unto Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy

Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, Amen. The Lord be with you. (congregation responds) Let us pray. Be seated. Gracious God, source of all truth and wisdom all knowledge and love without your guidance and inspiration this day would not be possible. For these, our graduating students we pray that they might be blessed with self confidence and determination to use their lives and what they've learned here in the service of causes which benefit humanity. We are conscious oh, God, of the many needs present within our world. Humanity has made progress but there is still hunger, ignorance, prejudice and fear. We pray that these young people may go forth into a new, into our world, with a burning desire to rectify these wrongs. We pray for fellow students and teachers in places where freedom and truth are being tested. Particularly those in universities and colleges of South Africa. We pray for fellow students and teachers in countries where there is war or civil strife. Particularly those who work and study in Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, may they persevere in spite of the terrors around them and be strengthened in their search for the knowledge that brings peace. We pray for those who are engaged in the work of research and discovery, that their minds may be continually enlightened to see more of your glory. We pray for those who teach, that their love of learning may never grow cold and their respect for the wonder of developing young minds never be dulled. We pray for all those who by economic adversity or lack of natural ability are denied educational opportunity. We pray for those in the class of 1986 who have died since this journey began. Louise, Molly, Allison, Ted, and remember them with thanks. For all seekers after truth that their minds maybe opened to new revelation and their will, strength and to follow the truth disclosed. This we pray expectant of your grace and care, Amen. (organ plays) (choir sings) Please stand for the responsive prayer. (rustling) Let us pray. Almighty God, as you have granted us a place in this University, hallow to us this day when we dedicate ourselves to the life and work to which you have called us, that we may remember with gratitude the families and friends who have cared for us. (congregation responds) That in the life ahead, that we may keep faith with those who loved us and trusted us and whose hopes follow us. (congregation responds) That we may enter with good encourage and constant purpose upon a task which await us. (congregation responds) From all vanity and pride as if our accomplishments were of our soul creation. (congregation responds) From neglect to the opportunities which are all about us and from distrust of our ability to meet the duties of each dawning day. (congregation responds) That the example of lies and generous people who have gone before us and our families and here in this University may save us from folly and self indulgence. (congregation responds) More especially that you would show us to your way of love in all that we do or say that we should come to love the Lord our God with our soul and mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. (congregation responds) These things and whatever else you see needful and right for us, we ask in your Holy name, Amen. (organ plays) (choir sings) And now class of 1986, may the grace, power and love of God go with you now, and always. (choir sings) ♪ Amen, amen, amen, amen, amen ♪ ♪ Amen, amen ♪ (organ plays)