

- The gospel lesson is from the gospel according to Saint Mathew, the 21st chapter reading from the 33rd through the 46th verses. " Listen to another parable. "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, "put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, "and built a watch-tower. "Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. "When the harvest time had come, "he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. "But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, "killed another and stoned another. "Again he sent other slaves, more than the first "and they treated them in the same way. "Finally he sent his son to them saying, "They will respect my son. "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him "and get his inheritance. "So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, "and killed him. "Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, "what will he do to those tenants? "They said to him, he will put those wretches "to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard "to other tenants who will give him the produce "at the harvest time. "Jesus said to them, have you never read in the Scriptures, "the stone that the builders rejected "has become the cornerstone. "This was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes. "Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God "will be taken away from you and given to a people "that produces the fruits of the kingdom. "The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, "and it will crush anyone on whom it falls. "When the chief priests and the Pharisees "heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. "They wanted to arrest him "but they feared the crowds "because they regarded him as a prophet." This is the word of the Lord.

- Let us pray. Gracious God made the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. What a glorious weekend we have celebrated here at Duke University. Going back to Thursday afternoon and the founders convocation, a stirring address by Mary Siemens reminding us of the heritage of Duke University. The mystical relationship that so many of us have with this university and with a wonderful community of people over the years. Activities through the weekend, the unveiling of the statue of Benjamin Newton Duke on Saturday. Truly a great and visionary man, a faithful man. Celebration of the Founders Society. We gather this morning as part of Founders Weekend. And I am privileged to be the Joseph Harrison Jackson preacher, a legacy to one of the true giants and greatest preachers of the 20th century. And to top it all off, its World Communion Sunday. We truly are blessed with a multiple overwhelming of goodness and celebration this weekend. But I have a problem. You see the text for today were not chosen by me but are assigned as part of the lectionary. And as you heard the President and Dr. Smith read those lessons I had a choice. Here on Founders Weekend I could either preach from the gospel and the parable of the wicked tenants or the passage from Philippians, where Paul writes, "Forgetting what lies behind." Upon reflection, I concluded that forgetting was better than wickedness. And so we turn to the epistle to the Philippians. What could Paul possibly mean about forgetting what lies behind and how might that bear on our celebration of the founding of Duke University and of the men and women whose benefaction and whose contributions of resources and time and energy through these last 75 years have made such a difference? Well, surely Paul doesn't literally mean to forget the past, after all in the verses which immediately precede that he has just recounted some features of his life, recalling his life as someone who could have pride in the flesh, that he was blameless before the law. He

recalls the past. But then he says, I count all of my accomplishments and remember this is not a story of someone who had had a wretched life before a conversion. Paul understands his life to have been one of accomplishments, blameless before the law. But now he counts it as rubbish because of his new life. And he enjoins us to forget what lies behind for the sake of looking forward to what lies ahead. To the glory of God in Jesus Christ or as he puts it, the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. He calls us to set our eyes on the prize, to look to the future. To remember that when we're driving a car, the front windshield is always much larger than the rearview mirror. Oh, but we're tempted, we're tempted. Not simply to honor the past but to dwell on it. To want to live in it regardless of whether our life has been blameless or whether it is a history of suffering and sin and injustice and oppression, oh, it's easy to wanna live in the past. In the book of Numbers, there's a story of the Israelites out in the wilderness and Moses sends out 12 spies to spy out the promised land. And the spies come back. They had a majority report and a minority report. The majority report was offered by 10 of the spies they say, "Yes, the the promised land is a beautiful sight. "It's a land flowing with milk and honey "but there are too many obstacles. "There are people we'd have to go through "who look like giants. "We better not do it, we better go back to Egypt." Only two of the 12 spies say that, "We ought to go forward "that if it is God calling us into the future, "we ought to trust that God will lead us there "and help us to overcome whatever obstacles we face." The Israelites are asked which report to accept. And they accept the majority report. They cry out to Moses, "Let us go back to Egypt." My father used to say that every church he'd ever known had a back to Egypt committee in it. Every person I've ever known, myself included, has a part of our soul claimed by the back to Egypt committee. We look to the future, to uncertainty, to risk, to change, to vulnerability and then we want to go back to Egypt. We want to dwell on the past. We want to live there, because it's safer, it's familiar. But Paul doesn't want us simply to dwell on the past, to live in the past, to focus on it. Rather, Paul calls us to honor the past but only in the context of setting our sights for the sake of the future, to have our eyes on the prize and not just any prize but focused on God in Christ Jesus. It is because of the glory of what Paul experiences of life in Christ that he can count even a successful life in the past as rubbish because transformation has occurred. To keep your eyes on the prize. It is that kind of focus, which I think made Benjamin Newton Duke's life so extraordinary. He was an industrialist, a businessman, a trustee of Trinity College, one of the founders of Duke University but he was also an extraordinarily generous and faithful man who gave generously not only to educational institutions of Trinity and Duke but also to black colleges, and to orphanages. And it was sad of him that he had never turned down a request from a needy preacher. He had that kind of faithfulness. That kind of vision. After he died, George Allen reported having heard B.N. Duke's wife say at his funeral, "This was a saint on earth." He had that kind of impact. That kind of expansive vision that didn't ask whether something could be done but how. That changed people's lives. That reached out to others. It was that kind of focus, that kind of vision that in the early 1960s inspired black children in Birmingham, Alabama to march out of a church, two by two to challenge Bull Connor and the situation in Birmingham. The Children's march was a testimony to vision being put into action, focusing not on what had been in the past but on faithful witness in the present for the sake of a different future. And we learned that six and seven year old children had more power than the fire hoses. It is that kind of vision of keeping our eyes set on the prize, of allowing God to call us forth into a new future animated Duke University in its founding. A vision of having this glorious chapel not only built to the honor and glory of God but placing it at the center of the campus so that erudition and religion would be linked together in a recognition that truth and wisdom and faithfulness are not at odds but go together. In a time when many people are wondering whether education has lost its

course, whether we have any sense of purpose and vision of what animates us. May we remain faithful to the vision of James B. and Benjamin N. and those men and women through the years who have continued to link together the importance of every edition and religion, knowledge and vital piety. It is what has shaped, not only this university, but also so many lives that have passed through it. Paul calls us to look forward to the future. On this Founders Day, we are called also to honor the past, to give thanks for the witness of our forebearers. Jaroslav Pelikan makes an important distinction between tradition and traditionalism. Tradition, Pelican writes, "Is the living faith of the dead. "Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." Let us always be heirs of tradition without being captured by traditionalism. Let us look forward to the future. In so doing, let us focus on Christ Jesus. Sometimes these days when we think about a race, one of Paul's favorite metaphors of running the race, we think about it as an individual contest of superhuman focused effort. But that's not really the way the race is to be run. It's not for isolated individuals because the race that Paul calls us to is not measured by success, it's not measured by net worth, it's not measured by the number of degrees, it is measured by our faithfulness. There's a story told of an event in the Special Olympics that was held in Seattle a number of years ago. Nine young men and women lined up at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. The gun went off, and eight of those people came running down toward the finish line. The ninth one stumbled right out of the blocks and fell down and hurt his knees. And he cried out and then he cried. All eight of the other runners stopped, looked around, saw that he had fallen down. They went back to help him up. One girl with down syndrome, kissed him on the forehead and on the knee and said, "There that will make it better." They helped him up. And then all nine of them joined arms and they walked all the way to the finish line together. That's the kind of vision of the race we're involved in. Not one where we're trying to outdo the other, not one where we're trying to beat the other, but one where we are concerned with the welfare of all the others. If our vision and our pursuit of truth and wisdom and faithfulness does not include an expansive vision of what it means to serve and help others, then we will have fallen way short in the race. Benjamin Duke didn't turn people away. We need to be a people in the pursuit of truth and wisdom but also in the service of others. For there is no better way to finish the race than to do so in the company, arm and arm of our brothers and sisters. For at the close of our lives, when we are face to face with God, the question won't be why weren't you Paul? Why weren't you Benjamin Newton Duke? Why weren't you Joseph Jackson? Why weren't you Mother Teresa? The question will be, what did you do in your life to show faithfulness to God? What did you do to pursue truth and wisdom? What did you do to help and serve others? May we all be in a position to have it said of us so that we would not have to say it ourselves? What Sarah Duke said of her late husband, "This was a saint on earth." At Duke University, we talk a lot about our goals for the future. We invoke that wonderful phrase of former president Sanford that Duke is marked by an outrageous ambition. And that has led us forward to extraordinary heights. But I would say that we are always to link that outrageous ambition to extravagant faithfulness. To keep our eyes on the prize of the call of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. As we gather to celebrate communion this morning, we commune with the Dukes, with Joseph Jackson, with the saints of the church through all the ages, and with our brothers and sisters in all the corners of the world. As we do so, let us remind ourselves that as we honor the past God is calling us forth to a bright and exciting future and calling us all to rededicate our lives to extravagant faithfulness keeping our eyes on the prize.