

- And so with grateful hearts, we laid today these offerings before thee. Amen (organ upbeat music)

- The Academic Community, and the church may not need with Shakespeare to find tongues and trees, books in the running Brooks sermons in stones. But our text and titled today are written in stone. Where he, who runs may read if you will, "A charitable man is the true lover of God." Is carved in stone in letters almost a foot high, not far from where we are just now. And where we may read it daily as we cross the chapel court, if we see it. One of the fascinating characteristics of this Gothic architecture is a striking diversity almost swallowed up in the unity of the whole and the uniformity of the style and material. The visitor or newcomer to Duke is likely to remark this harmony, unity, uniformity. Staying a while, he may discern more variety. What Professor Blackburn's lovely book on the architecture of Duke University terms, "The restlessness and irregularity of the Gothic. Towers of different heights, one massive, another more aspiring and delicate, flat roofs, high angled peaks here and there and unexpected parapet, chimneys of many shapes and stuff, residence halls now two, now five stories high." And as Dr. Blackburn reports, "Different periods of Gothic style influential in quite differing buildings." The varying details of symbolism and embellishment hold even more of mystery and surprise for the observant. Even after years of walking the campus nearly every day, the dozens of carved stone shields representing the arts, the elements, the seals of great universities and schools of medicine and makers of books, and carved griffins, grotesques, bosses where ribs of ceilings join with all manner of grimacing faces of students hearted study, no doubt or thinking of their professors and other symbols to surprise us and challenge our interpretation. Almost any old timer among us might discover something new, yet quite old, this day. But there is one symbol on our campus which awaits no search and needs no such interpretation. Before a visitor is aware of the rest of the university, his eyes claimed by this chapel and he must know why it is here. "I want the central building to be a church." Said Mr. Duke. As plans were being made for this university, a great towering church which will dominate all of the surrounding buildings because such an edifice would be bound to have a profound influence on the spiritual life of the young men and young women who come here. This great towering church stands here at the center of the campus to take every thought captive to the Lord of all that is true and real and good. Not for the dominance of dogma, but for grateful acknowledgement of the gift of our being and our new being. The God inspired search for truth, the sharing of such knowledge and its use in the service of men that ought to be playing for every newcomer and old timer on this campus. But what of are the epigram with which we began? Where is it and why is it there? And what has it meant to say to us? It was a surprise to me and even more, have I've been surprised to find that others have faced it thousands of times without seeing it. I've been a student here for several years, before I looked up from the chapel court and saw stretch between the rounded turrets flanking the gabbled end of the dining hall that reminding, accusing text in stone, "A charitable man is the true lover of God". There it was, plain and commanding where every student, staff member and visitor might daily see and heed. Why had I not read it before? And why haven't you? Is there a parable in our common inability to see such a plain, artless and obvious truth? Are we too rushed, too occupied with ourselves and our concerns, too blind, too cast down, too unwilling to acknowledge it? Perhaps such a parable is significant to us only if the epigram says something we need but

fail to hear. Does it? Or is it too trite to deserve our notice? I must confess that I waited years before I could bring myself to preach upon it a few years back and to speak further upon it today. Perhaps the prior question is, why were those words blazed in there before unseeing eyes? Could it be that this is a word to the faculty and students of the Divinity School who look daily across this open quadrangle toward the student union? Is this a way of saying to us, beware you are much talk about God and man, not just words but deeds are called for. And deeds of charity at that. It is not enough to say, "Lord, Lord" and do not what your Lord is bidding. Remember the parable of the last judgment and all those who had, or had not served Christ through loving service of their needy fellows. That would be a salutary word for us to hear. And would it go onto warrant a peril to the professionally religious? Would it say, "Familiarity with the holy, verbal familiarity may hide the holy and its claims upon us, allowing us to insulate ourselves from God's claim with grave or glib talk about him." Or does the epigram simply say to us at the Divinity School, the intellectual love of God, however exalted your theological inquiry and scholarship is not enough. Clothe with the divine reality confronting you and do his will among men. Or perhaps this text in stone is reminding us how down to earth Christianity is, after all. Did not Archbishop William Temple say that Christianity is the most materialistic of religions? It is relevant to such homely, daily matters as breaking bread together in brotherly fellowship with whoever comes our way in the dining hall, but relevant to where men do not have food. Granted that theologians need such admonitions, but times, surely such a prominently placed message must be meant for more than these. Could it be saying some of the same things and more to all the worshipers going to, and from this chapel? This is not quite the word of an Amos preaching denunciations around the temple to priests and worshipers declaring for God, "I hate, I despise your feast and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away from me the noise of your songs. To the melody of your hearts I will not listen, but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." No, this graven text does not decry our piety or prayers, our exalted service of worship in song and prayer and ministry of the word. It is not a matter of either or, either worship or justice. But neither is it a matter of that other pair of conjunctions, both, and, both worship and justice. Rather, it is another yet, and perhaps a more demanding one. Saying therefore, worship God who loves. Therefore charity. But what does charity mean? Although a dictionary may not offer us much more than a series of varied customary meanings, consider for a start a range of connotations in the Oxford Universal Dictionary, charity. Christian love, especially the Christian love of our fellow men. Love, natural affection, spontaneous goodness. A disposition to judge hopefully, of men and their actions and to make allowance for their shortcomings. Fairness, equity, benevolence especially to the poor, charitableness, arms giving, arms, a bequest, foundation, institution and so forth for the benefit of others especially of the poor or helpless. So have varied meanings registered in the language of the race. Some to times reflecting deeply the message of the New Testament. All of this sounds pretty practical, however, and down to earth. And it points us back to that eminently practical, ethically searching First Letter of John from which we heard this morning. If anyone has the world's good and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but indeed and in truth. Or again, if anyone says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. That epigram in stone may be there to remind all of us what the true love of God requires. Lest we leave the chapel too much at ease in conscience. And how far would it push the test of our love of God? To check on our love at boundaries of creed or country or color. And how deeply would it test the ambivalence of love and hostility within our very closest relationships? Is this why we may have

worshiped here a hundred Sundays and never seen that warning spelled out large letters right before our eyes? "A charitable man is a true lover of God". But are these words directed primarily to chapel worshipers after all? Are they not published openly for all to see, who will? Whether worshipers or not, and on every day? Do they perhaps represent some high humanitarian impatience over the intricacies and preoccupations of religions? Or even a humanistic reservation about the reality in claims of God with a strong concern rather, for near and real troubled fellow beings? When might cite Ella Wheeler Wilcox's quatrain of another era, "So many gods, so many creeds, so many paths that wind and wind, when just the art of being kind is all this sad world needs." Now, however justified a plague upon our houses for denominational squabbles over trivia, for straining out nets and swallowing camels, this bland versus hardly worthy of those stones inscribed upon our campus. How glib and cheap our sterner world today has shown that shallow well-meaning optimism of another day to be. With its contentious, let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man. Yet for all its thinness, it was company to a profound of social concern for the relief of man's estate, a vigorous social gospel movement, which sought to demonstrate in action such words as, "no man has ever seen God", "if we love one another God abides in us", or, "if anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar". Moreover, lest we presume to some theological and ecclesiastic monopoly on such love of fellow man, we hear from one after another of the articulate humanists, how essential love is for human life. Even as if to rescue us from religion which allegedly misunderstands and misdirects Bob. Here, and Erich Fromm, for example, among on the psychotherapist, maintaining that love is the answer to the problem of human existence. Mature love, he said, is union under the conditions of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality. Love is an active power in man. A power which breaks through the walls, which separate man from his fellow man. Which unite him with others. Love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separateness yet it permits him to be himself to retain his integrity. Love, he says, is an activity, an activity primarily giving, not receiving. Love, implies care. Love is the active concern for the life and growth of that which we love. And such care, he goes on to say, such care and concern implied responsibility. Unless responsibility turn into domination and possessiveness. Love implies, respect. And respect requires knowledge. So Erich Fromm calls repeatedly for mature love and the practice of the art of loving. For him, this is humanly possible without God. In deed, the God of most of us, he seems to feel, might prevent such wise wholesome love. But surely someone says, we're getting away from our stone text when we depend on a present day, humanistic psychologist outside the faith to remind us what our own faith has long called for, for this must be an old saying, and one rooted in theistic religion, in the Hebrewaic Christian tradition. A charitable man is the true lover of God. The fact is, I do not know who put those words up there, or what was meant in doing so. Or what was intended by their original author. And no one queried could give me the answers. Can those words yet speak to our condition? Do we want them to? Isn't it pleasant or just to dally with them while as in this morning's discourse? To keep safe distance from real involvement with them? Aren't we in danger of letting ourselves in for something? Something more disturbingly searching, some kiaki guardian probing that shows our very virtues to be sin. Our human love to be, but desire to possess for ourselves? Our love to God, a way of looking out after ourselves? For a long time, I wanted to preach a sermon on this text in stone. It's so charming and so charmingly hidden in plain sight. And such an apt parable for our hiding from reality and its claims. But for just as long, I avoided preaching that sermon for that seemingly charming text in quat word and stone carving is too starkly, simple and clear. Like the telling words of scripture read today, too clearly demanding of our full love to God and man, demanding of our whole selves. So we've come near the end of the sermon

and we have protected ourselves against these claims. And isn't this, after all the vindication of the parable we spoke of earlier? We see and yet we see not. Or see not as to heed. What consider what it might mean to heed those words. It might mean a clarifying, saving discovery of what life really is, not just in ideas but in the depth of personal existence, we turn to a dictionary and found some customary connotations of charity or Christian love, we heard from a psychotherapist of love, which involves giving in care, responsible concern, respect, loving knowledge but the essential denotation of love, the divine demonstration is spread through the new Testament and especially in the person and words and deeds and death of Jesus Christ. To read and ponder and yield to that living manifestation of what it means to be a charitable man is to be deeply searched, tried and redeemed from this recurring self-centeredness we all suffer. As the Apostle Paul thought under the influence of the Jesus Christ, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so is to remove of mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful. It is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrong but rejoices in the right. Love, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. If this is what lies behind this stone text on our minds and in our campus today, it's a sort of punchline for all that we are doing here, not to us in chapel but in classroom, in dormitory, in dining hall in the envisioning of our future and the use of our lives. It seems to be saying to us, pursue all the knowledge and wisdom you can for this is God's. Prepare for the most effective use of your mind and body, for these or God's. Enter tellingly and responsibly into the communal life and do your job, for this is God's. But all of this in the transformed spirit of one who came, not to be ministered unto but to minister, not to be served, but to serve. To use all we have and are, for our brothers. To be steward servant of others good. Both the love of God and loved and the love called for in us are exhibited all over the pages of the New Testament and here and there down the slopes of Christian history. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. There is the standard, there is the imperative. But this is not only a claim, an imperative, an order or a law. It is basically a gift. The New Testament is proclaiming and this church, this great towering church, this chapel is here to proclaim that life and new life are really a gift to disclose that the meaning of life in love of others is a divine enablement. A catching up of ourselves into what God has done and is doing. What makes sense of human existence. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another, is the outcome of that gift. We love because he first loved us. When this is translated out of the terms, the familiar terms of love, into the everyday actions of personal existence and relationships, does it not mean that we are able to accept and care for and be concerned profoundly about our fellows because we know that our own life and our acceptance, and our belonging are a gift. A gift made plain, a gift proclaimed by this chapel, and a gift pointed to indeed, by that stone text, across the end of the dining hall. "A charitable man is a true lover of God". The real meaning of our life is in that openness toward, that concern for others which may underlie all we are and have and do. If we allow ourselves to be brought into trust into that spirit, in the very heart of things manifest in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, what thou has said to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord, do thou work in our lives and our relationships. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the communion of his holy spirit be with us all. (organ upbeat music)