

### ***Senior Pastor's Remarks:***

Yesterday, I was reviewing the recording of the choral concert held Sunday afternoon. I was blown away, technically speaking. Craig Allen worked hard on this recording, ironing out the inconsistencies in the sound. He added graphics to show the title of the pieces and the composers' names. Overall, it was a phenomenal recording that we simply could not have done even one year ago. For all the last few years have taken from us, they have also given us the capacity to share some of the remarkable things that happen at Grace. Yet by the end of the recording, I was also left with the impression that recordings don't do it justice. Worship is that way, too. The full impact of a live event is impossible to transmit on a recording. You just have to be there.

This Sunday's Gospel text ([Matt 22:1-14](#)) is a parable about an event that cannot be missed. A king is throwing a wedding banquet. It is expected that everyone will attend, that everyone will know better than to miss out on this important occasion. Instead, several of the people invited 'make light of it', going about their lives as if this banquet were nothing special. Most of the time spent preaching or studying this parable addresses the way it depicts the king's response to the way people treat this event. Fair enough. The king is meant to represent God, and God should always be the primary focus. However, I think we could dwell on just the first six verses or so and practice a little introspection. When we get the chance to respond to God's invitation, what does that look like? What (or whom) do we prioritize?

Don't start thinking this is going to be a guilt trip. That's not my style. Everyone knows we are busier than ever, with calendars more subdivided and crowded than at any previous time. We are all spread thin, and we feel the tension of that reality. Fortunately, even during this time of stretching, we have managed to put forward some important events this year. We have identified several opportunities for celebrating Grace's legacy (concerts, dinners, reasons to share life together) and several ways of building on our legacy for the future (Strategic Initiatives). We are making the focus clear in the next few years, and particularly in the coming year, as our stewardship team is sharing with us this month. We will be growing leaders and volunteers, increasing connections in our congregation, and deepening our commitment to the campus and surrounding community. This is all good news! Importantly, we aren't doing these things because all of us have so much time on our hands and nothing else going on – we're doing these things because God invites us to take part in these ways! So, the question is, How will we respond? Or, to borrow from the parable Jesus uses, How will you respond to the king's invitation?

We are going to continue to celebrate Grace's heritage. Our heritage is not like a financial inheritance – a lump sum, accumulated from the work of our forebears. Our heritage is a mission. This mission is one given by God, one that evolves as needs and capacities change. Our heritage is also an invitation, one to which 100 years of Lutherans have responded again and again. Let us do the same, Grace Family.

We will be sharing the recording of the concert sometime in the coming week. We've got pictures of the dinner on the Facebook page, the Pet Blessing, and all kinds of other activities. There's a slideshow running in the Fellowship Hall on Sunday mornings with about a century of memories from all kinds of ministries that took place on our little corner of Rock Hill. These ways we keep track of the amazing things God is doing at Grace are all beautiful windows into our shared life together. They pale in comparison, though, to the memories of the people who took part in the images. Come to the party, friends. Let's make more memories – and make a difference for Christ – together.

Peace in Christ,  
Pr. Gregg

***Pastor's Remarks:***

Throughout my time at Grace, I've been grateful for our connection with Winthrop and its community. It's an integral part of our origin story, it's brought us members and staff and interns who make our congregation more vibrant. It's kept us continually looking beyond our doors out into our neighborhood. It's part of who we are. In this past month, I've been even more aware of and thankful for this connection, as I've seen up close just how important our relationship is for all of us.

Last Sunday, we held our 100th Anniversary Choral Concert. The choir of the afternoon was made up of members from both our Grace choirs and the Winthrop Chamber Singers, who are Dr. Jeremy Mims' highest level university singers. Several of Jeremy's students also came as musicians, playing piano and drums. That alone is such a gift – in Jeremy, we have an excellent Director of Music, and he values the connection he can bring between Grace and Winthrop singers, so he has made that effort on our behalf. Thank you, Jeremy! And beyond the beautiful music that was shared that afternoon, I was struck by the additional joy that filled our space. As the choir sang, particularly during the gospel music pieces, I saw bodies swaying and dancing, faces filled with delight, both in the choir and in the audience. The music moved beyond our ears into our hearts! The beauty that was shared was more than aesthetic – it was soul-filling. And that joy was present after the concert, as well. I saw many Grace members going up to Chamber Singers and complimenting them, thanking them for being here, and sharing the happiness that the music brought. I saw the connections that have been built with our Music Interns especially, as Grace people sought them out to tell them just how great they were!

This fall, we've welcomed a new intern, Kaylee. In addition to being part of the choir, Kaylee has taken the position as our Young Youth Choir intern, and she's been leading this group for several weeks now. I've enjoyed seeing our young youth meet her, learn from her, and look forward to time with her! I'm thankful that we have such a great intern program, wherein Winthrop students can learn in ways that will advance their futures, and our younger members see great examples of what it is to live into your passions and share them with others!

Of course, our most consistent connection with Winthrop over the years has been our campus ministry. As we await the arrival of our new Campus Minister, Pr. Gregg has been filling that spot, and I've been part of the Tuesday night meetings. I have really loved this time with our college students and I already know I'm going to miss it! Each week, we get to spend a few hours talking about college, what matters to them in this part of their lives, and how their faith impacts it all. I've been delighted by the questions they ask and the insights they have – they are clearly looking to learn and grow in faith, and I'm so thankful that they trust Pr. Gregg and me to be part of that journey. And that connection is not just one way – our college students are taking part in Grace ministries as well! For example, one of our Peer Ministers, Cat, has been helping out with Young Youth and GYM. The kids have loved having her, and she has jumped right in to our fun.

I wonder if you've noticed our Winthrop connections lately. If you have, I'd love to hear about them! And if not, I encourage you to keep an eye out – there are some great things going on!

Peace in Christ,  
Pr. Rachel