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Communion Meditation for Vivaldi's "Gloria" Sunday¹

There are two things that strike me about the occasion for Antonio Vivaldi's composing of the beautiful and wondrous and soaring "Gloria" through which the choir and Ray and Carol are helping us to worship God this morning. The first is who this concerto was originally written for: orphan girls. In the Venice of the early 1700s, there were four institutions devoted solely to taking in orphaned children. Now, you might ask: why so many orphanages for such a relatively small place? Well, diseases that we think of as almost vanquished were often fatal; life, even in sophisticated Venice was a sometimes chancy thing and smallpox or pneumonia or the infections following an workplace accident could render a family's children parent-less in the space of a few days or even hours.

So, many of the girls who became orphaned due to one tragedy or another went into one of these state-sponsored orphanages for girls in Venice where Vivaldi was the violin master. Now, the very fact that an orphanage would have such a position tells you that these folks knew, as our culture sometimes forgets, that music has power to heal and make whole. And Vivaldi wrote today's beautiful concerto for those orphan girls; they learned to play their instruments and they learned to make amazing beauty out of the ugliness of what had befallen them. *Beauty out of ugliness*. That is what Antonio Vivaldi committed his life to, and the first lesson, I believe, that we can take from this glorious piece of music and the inspiration for its composition as we come to

¹I have benefitted from <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=3065> in this meditation.

the Lord's Table is just this: we too are ones who come to this place, this moment, this meal to be nourished so that we can, in whatever way God has gifted us, help bring beauty out of ugliness, hope out of despair, healing out of hurt. But we can't do that if we are empty vessels ourselves, and so we come this day to this table to be nourished for the task that God puts before each of us in whatever place we find ourselves – to heal and to bring hope, indeed to help bring loveliness out of that which may not be lovely at all. As you come to the Table this morning, then, ask yourselves: where is there ugliness around me that I can seek to assuage?

The second lesson is this: in 1709 Vivaldi was released from his employment at that orphanage. Why? Well, he had worked himself out of a job. The girls in his charge had blossomed musically to the point that they no longer needed his tutelage, and through that music those holes in their hearts had been helped to be healed. Our hope this day, as we come to this Table, is that through God's mighty power of love working through ones like us, someday we too will work ourselves out of a job; someday, as the scripture so poignantly predicts, there will be peace on earth and goodwill to all; someday unnecessary ugliness will indeed have been vanquished and God's own hope and healing and wholeness will have broken forth. Our job is to help God with that, our job is work for a day when we will have worked ourselves out of a job because of what God has been able to do through us. Again, we can only do so amidst the inevitable disappointments and discouragements because we are well fed for that work. And so, again, we come to this Table, our hearts soaring from the music, our lives recommitted to the job God has for us and with the prayer that someday that job will no longer be needed. Jesus Himself, the one who is our model and teacher for a

life lived seeking to bring beauty out of ugliness, did so on earth as he ministered among us, and he did so with those disciples, whom he gathered in that Upper Room, where he took the bread....