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## MUSIC HATH CHARMS TO SOOTHE THE SAVAGE BEAST

Tired from moving across the country a scant three weeks ago. Annoyed and bothered by a broken foot. Mildly worried about the whereabouts of three lamps, which really ought to have surfaced by now, in a space as small as our new apartment. There would have been any number of reasons to resent getting into yet another plane and heading off to be a chaplain to a conference that would take me away from my other obligations for a full week.

But this one is different. It is a conference of church musicians. My only duties are to lead worship, preach and to sit and talk with those of them who wish a private chat.

Talk about what? Whatever they want -- to catch up on the year that has passed since we last saw each other, to share the news of a new position in a new part of the country. To mull over the impending shock of retirement after decades of service.

Or maybe it's something else: sorrow over a heartbreak in one's family. The misery of bereavement. The pain of loneliness. Or anguish over a toxic work situation, from which there is no ready escape. And, always a feature of the artist's life, fear of unemployment -- she has heard that the church is cutting the music budget, he has a new rector who doesn't like the kind of music he chooses. Or a cadre of people in the new church don't like it.

I'll talk one on one with dozens of people here about these things, and about other things. Some of them won't have realized that they could use a talk like this until the conference is almost over, so my dance card, which is fairly light on our first day together, will fill up as the week proceeds. I am tired at the end of every day here.

But I also get to sit in on their rehearsals. 150 gifted singers work all week on the music they will present at a solemn evensong on Friday, as well as in the Eucharist on Sunday. I don't sing with them -- I sit in the back and listen. I am like your mom when you took piano lessons as a child, sitting in the next room and listening to you play: I hear them go over troublesome spots on the music again and again, until they get it right. I hear this week's eminent choir director ask them to give him his understanding of the music, and I hear people who know just what he means take it in and give it corporate life. I watch their exquisite concentration, watch them remember what it was like to be students. I attend an organ recital and a master class, in which the organist on the faculty this year shares what he knows with those who also ply his ancient trade. I attend a concert by a guest vocal ensemble. Music washes over me, again and again. cleansing and renewing me with each beautiful wave.

Musicians. They are a special strain of the human race. They are not normal: they can do things most of us cannot do and hear things most of us do not hear. They are a gorgeous rarity. It is a privilege to serve them. People will thank me for this or that when it is time to leave this place -- for the sermon, for the chat.

But no. All the thanks go to them.