

“Ihr werdet weinen und heulen” BWV 103

1. *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen, aber die Welt wird sich freuen. Ihr aber werdet traurig sein, doch eure Traurigkeit soll in Freude verkehret werden.*¹

2. Wer sollte nicht in Klagen untergehn,
Wenn uns der Liebste⁴ wird entrissen?
Der Seelen Heil, die Zuflucht kranker Herzen
Acht nicht auf unsre Schmerzen.

3. Kein Arzt ist ausser dir zu finden,
Ich suche durch ganz Gilead;

1. *You [followers of Jesus] will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice. But² [although] you will be sad,³ yet your sadness shall be turned into joy.*

2. Who should not sink into lamentations
When the Most Beloved [Jesus] is snatched away from us?⁵
The soul's cure/salvation, the refuge of ailing/distressed⁶ hearts [Jesus],
[At present]⁷ pays no heed to our sorrows.⁸

3. No physician is to be found other than you [Jesus];
I search through all of “Gilead.”¹¹

¹John 16:20.

²Luther's Greek source-text for the Gospel of John contained the extra word “de” here (not found in better Greek sources), which (depending on context) can be adversative (rendered in English, “but”) or connective (“and”). Luther, idiosyncratically among translators of his source-text, read this “de” as adversative, making this “But [although] you will be sad” rather than “And you will be sad.”

³For this biblical quotation, there is no punctuation in Bach's original materials, and his “doch” is spelled with lower-case “d.” The Luther Bibles of Bach's day, however, give a comma between “sein” and “doch.” Modern editions of the cantata enter an editorial period in the place of the Bible's comma and accordingly give “doch” with upper-case “d,” presumably because they assume that the phrase “Ihr aber werdet traurig sein” (set as recitative, without tonal closure, in the bass line of Bach's score) is meant for one bass singer, and assume, further, that the phrase “doch eure Traurigkeit soll in Freude verkehret werden” (set as concerted music for bass, with staggered entries, voice-by-voice, of added tenor, alto, and soprano) is meant for a choir with multiple singers on each of its four lines. Bach's own ensemble here most probably had four singers in total, such that an individual bass performs both phrases as a single, logically continuous utterance with implied comma between the two phrases.

⁴In the poet's 1728 printed publication of the libretto, this reads “das Liebste,” which may on the face of it seem to refer to a thing rather than a person. But the expression may well have been meant as “das Liebste [Jesulein]” (“the Most Beloved [darling Jesus]”). The “-lein” in words such as “Jesulein” is a diminutive of size or affection, or both (i.e., “Jesulein” can be employed for the infant Jesus [“little/darling Jesus”] and for the adult Jesus [“darling Jesus”]). In the hymnbooks of Bach's day the various stanzas of “Du, o schönes Weltgebäude” ended with either “allerschönstes Jesulein” (“most-beautiful-of-all, darling-Jesus”) or “allerliebstes Jesulein” (“most-beloved-of-all, darling-Jesus”).

⁵The gospel reading that was chanted on the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was written is John 16:16-23, which commences with Jesus telling his disciples that he will soon (namely, by way of his crucifixion) go back to God the father (in heaven). This situation was traditionally understood as having been predicted in Isaiah 53:8, “Er ist aus dem Lande der Lebendigen weggerissen, da er um die Missetat meines Volkes geplagt war” (“He [taken, Christian-prophetically, to be Jesus] was snatched from the land of the living, when he was stricken [on the cross] for the transgression of my [God's] people”).

⁶“Krank” in this context is apparently not only meant to connote illness but also to be a synonym for “traurig” or “bekümmert” in their senses of “distressed.”

⁷Bach's intended audiences would have balked at any suggestion that Jesus never pays heed to the sorrows of his followers; the line here refers to his temporary absence from earth (with his father in heaven) before his return.

⁸“Schmerzen” can mean “pains” or “sorrows.” This poetry is apparently riffing on Isaiah 53:4, where it says of God's suffering servant (understood, Christian-prophetically, to be Jesus), “er lud auf sich unsre Schmerzen” (“he laded upon himself our sorrows”).

¹¹These lines derive their sense from Jeremiah 8:22, “Ist denn keine Salbe in Gilead? Oder ist kein Arzt nicht da?” (“Is no ointment/balm [to be found] in Gilead? Or is no physician [to be found] there, none?”) The “balm of Gilead” was a resin from balsam trees in the mountain region of Galilee, a balm that was held to be, among other things, an antidote to poison. In traditional Christian interpretation the “balm of/in Gilead” was sometimes, as here, understood to prefigure the “physician” Jesus's blood that heals/saves his followers from the “poison” of sin.

Wer heilt die Wunden meiner Sünden,
Weil⁹ man hier keinen Balsam hat?
Verbirgst du dich, so muss ich sterben.
Erbarme dich, ach, höre doch!
Du suchest ja nicht mein Verderben,
Wohlan, so hofft mein Herze noch.¹⁰

Who will heal the wounds of my sins,
So long as¹² here [on earth] there is no “balm [of Gilead]”?¹³
If you [Jesus] hide yourself, then I must die.
Have mercy; ah, but hear [my plea].
Yes, you do not seek my ruin;
Well then, my heart thus yet hopes.

4. Du wirst mich nach der Angst auch wiederum
erquicken;¹⁴
So will ich mich zu deiner Ankunft schicken,
Ich traue dem Verheissungswort,
Dass meine Traurigkeit
In Freude soll verkehret werden.

4. After the anguish [I suffer in your absence] you will also
revive me again;¹⁵
I will thus prepare¹⁶ myself for your Coming;¹⁷
I trust the word of promise [from you]
That my sadness
Shall be turned into joy.

5. Erholet euch, betrübte Sinnen,¹⁸
Ihr tut euch selber allzu weh.
Lasst von dem traurigen Beginnen,
Eh ich in Tränen untergeh,
Mein Jesus lässt sich wieder sehen,
O Freude, der nichts gleichen kann!
Wie wohl ist mir dadurch geschehen,

5. Perk up, troubled spirits [of mine];
You cause yourselves excessive pain.
[Spirits,] take leave of the sad setting in [of your anguish]
Lest I should sink into tears;
My Jesus will reveal himself again;
O joy to which nothing can compare!
How well thereby have things turned out for me;

⁹In the poet's 1728 publication, this reads “Da” (in this context, “When”).

¹⁰In the poet's 1728 publication, this reads “Drum hofft mein armes Herze noch” (“Therefore my poor heart yet hopes”).

¹²In older German, “weil” was sometimes used as a synonym for “solange” (“so long as”).

¹³With regard to the “balm [of Gilead],” see fn. 11, above.

¹⁴In the poet's 1728 publication, this movement reads “Du wirst, mein Heiland, mich schon nach der Angst erquicken. / Wohlan! Ich will mich auch zu deiner Ankunft schicken. / Ich traue dem Verheissungswort, / Dass meine Traurigkeit, / Und dies vielleicht in kurzer Zeit, / Nach bang- und ängstlichen Gebärden, / In Freude soll verkehret werden” (“My saviour, you will certainly revive me after my anguish. / Well then! I will also prepare myself for your [end-time] Coming. / I trust the word of promise [from you] / That my sadness, / (And this perhaps in a short while, / After anxious and anguished bearings,) / Shall be turned into joy”). Note that “schon” is apparently used here not in its usual sense of “already,” but in one of its older-German senses as a synonym for “gewiss” (“certainly,” “surely”).

¹⁵The sense of this line is derived from Psalm 138:7, “Wenn ich mitten in der Angst wandle, so erquickest du mich” (“[Lord,] if I should walk in the midst of anguish, then you [will] revive me”), and also from John 16:21, where not seeing Jesus for a while and then seeing him again is spoken of as being akin to a woman's “anguish” (Luther Bibles, “Angst”) during her labor pains versus her “joy” (“Freude”) once the child has been brought into the world.

¹⁶In older German, including in various biblical contexts, “schicken” was often employed as a synonym for “rüsten”/“bereiten” (“to prepare”). An example that is grammatically analogous to this cantata line is Sirach 2:1, “Mein Kind, willst du Gottes Diener sein, so schicke dich zur Anfechtung” (“My child, if you will be God's servant, then prepare yourself for temptation”); “Anfechtung” (“temptation/vexation/affliction/tribulation”) was, and still is, the Lutheran term for a variety of tribulations surrounding doubts and terrors about one's moral and spiritual stature before God.

¹⁷“[Christi] Ankunft” (literally, “[Christ's] arrival/advent”) here refers to the time when the resurrected Jesus will come back to earth. In Bach's traditional Lutheranism, God's messiah, Jesus, is said to come from (eternal) heaven to (temporal) earth in three physical “advents.” The first advent is his human birth as a child of the virgin Mary of Nazareth; the second is his physical presence “in, with, and among/under” (German, “in, mit und unter”) the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the church's sacrament of communion and the consequent indwelling in the believer's heart; and the third is his coming back at the end time to judge the living and the dead (which in most Christian traditions is called “the Second Coming”).

¹⁸In some modern editions, the word “Sinnen” has been mistranscribed as “Stimmen” (“voices”).

Nimm, nimm mein Herz zum Opfer an!

Accept, [Jesus,] accept my heart as an offering.

**6. Ich hab dich einen Augenblick,
O liebes¹⁹ Kind, verlassen;
Sieh aber, sieh, mit grossem Glück
Und Trost ohn alle Massen
Will ich dir schon die Freudenkron
Aufsetzen und verehren;
Dein kurzes Leid soll sich in Freud
Und ewig Wohl verkehren.²⁰**

**6. I [Jesus] have left²¹ you for a moment,
O dear child;
But see, see: with great happiness [to you, the child],
And [with] comfort [to you, the child] without all measure,
Will I certainly²² set the crown²³ of joy upon you
And honor²⁴ [you with the gift of the crown];
Your brief suffering shall turn²⁵
Into joy and eternal wellbeing.**

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Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV103> for an annotated translation

¹⁹In the poet's 1728 publication, this reads "liebstes" ("dearest").

²⁰A stanza of "Barmherziger Vater, höchster Gott."

²¹"Verlassen" can mean either "to forsake" (i.e., to desert) or, more simply, "to leave" (i.e., to go away). The latter sense would seem to be indicated here. In John 16:28 Jesus says "I leave [Luther Bibles, "Ich verlasse"] the world to go to [God] the father," and this going away, according to 16:16 (a verse that is part of the gospel portion chanted on the liturgical occasion this cantata was designed for), is said to last only "a short while." The hymn is thus Christianizing the verbatim wording from Isaiah 54:7 that it quotes here in lines 1–2: "Ich hab dich ein klein Augenblick verlassen" (historically and literally, "I [God, your father] have forsaken you [Zion] for a small moment [your Babylonian exile]"; understood Christian-prophetically: "I [Jesus] have left you [my followers] for a small moment [to go away to God the father]")

²²"Schon" is used here apparently not in its usual sense of "already," but in one of its older-German senses, namely as a synonym for "gewiss" ("certainly," "surely").

²³This "crown of joy" is an alternative designation for the metaphorical "crown of glory," Jesus, who is given to Christian believers at the end time. 1 Thessalonians 2:19, in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, reads "Wer ist unser Hoffnung oder Freude, oder Krone des Ruhms? Seid nicht auch ihrs vor unserm HERRN Jesus Christus zu seiner Zukunft?" ("Who is our hope or joy, or crown of glory? Will not there be even you [fellow believers] before [the face of] our LORD Jesus Christ at his parousia [end-time Coming]?")

²⁴It is a serious theological error to translate "verehren" here as "worship," as it has sometimes been rendered; Jesus, the subject of this sentence, does not worship his followers.

²⁵In this closing movement of the cantata the active form appears: "soll sich in Freud verkehren" ("shall turn into joy"); in the opening movement, however, it was the passive form: "soll in Freude verkehret werden" ("shall be turned into joy").