

"Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen" BWV 66

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| 1. Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen,
Entweicht, ihr Schmerzen,
Es lebet der Heiland und herrschet in euch.
Ihr könnet verjagen
Das Trauern, das Fürchten, das ängstliche Zagen,
Der Heiland erquicket sein geistliches Reich. | 1. Rejoice, you hearts;
Depart, you sorrows;
The savior is alive ¹ and reigns in you.
You can chase away
Mourning, fearing, anxious trembling;
The savior fortifies ² his spiritual realm. |
| 2. Es bricht das Grab und damit unsre Not,
Der Mund verkündigt Gottes Taten,
Der Heiland lebt, so ist in Not und Tod
Den Gläubigen vollkommen wohl geraten. | 2. The grave is broken and with it our distress;
My mouth proclaims God's deeds;
The savior is alive, and so—in distress and death—
To believers, all has turned out entirely well. |
| 3. Lasset dem Höchsten ein Danklied erschallen
Vor sein Erbarmen und ewige Treu.
Jesus erscheinet, uns Friede zu geben,
Jesus berufet uns, mit ihm zu leben,
Täglich wird seine Barmherzigkeit neu. | 3. Let a song of thanks sound out to the Most High ³
For his mercy and eternal faithfulness.
Jesus appears, to grant us peace;
Jesus calls us to live with him;
His mercy becomes new every day. ⁴ |
| 4. Hoffnung:
Bei Jesu Leben freudig sein
Ist unsrer Brust ein heller Sonnenschein. ⁵
Mit Trost erfüllt auf seinen Heiland schauen
Und in sich selbst ein Himmelreich erbauen,
Ist wahrer Christen Eigentum. ⁶ | 4. Hope: ⁷
To be joyful in living with Jesus
Is bright sunshine to our breast.
To look, filled with comfort, upon his savior
And to build a kingdom of heaven ⁸ within himself
Is the true Christian's possession. |

¹The verb "leben" can mean "to live" or "to be alive." This is an Easter cantata, celebrating the resurrection (i.e., the being-alive-again) of Jesus.

²The verb "erquicken" is apparently being used here in its sense of "kräftigen" ("to strengthen," "to fortify"), not of "auffrischen" ("to refresh").

³"Most High"—*elyon* in Hebrew, *hupsistos* in Greek—is used in the Bible as a name for Israel's God, who dwells on high. In nonbiblical Greek, *hupsistos* was used for Zeus as the most high god.

⁴A variation on Lamentations 3:22-23, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "Die Güte des HERRN ist, dass wir nicht gar aus sind; seine Barmherzigkeit hat noch kein Ende, sondern sie ist alle Morgen neu, und deine Treue ist gross." ("It is [through] the goodness of the Lord [God] that we are not completely done for; his mercy, if anything, has no end; but it is new every morning, and great is your [i.e., God's] faithfulness").

⁵In the 1724 printed libretto booklets that were made available to Bach's congregation, this word was not "Sonnenschein" ("sunshine"), but "Gnadenschein" ("light of [divine] grace"). In the 1730s Bach prepared a new manuscript score, and his earlier materials for this cantata are now lost, so his original reading is not known.

⁶In the 1724 booklet, there was a comma at the end of this line, and the following two additional lines were printed: "Die Welt erstaunt bei meines Jesu Grab, / Und meint hier stirbet unser Ruhm" ("The world is astounded by the grave of my Jesus, / And supposes our glory/reputation dies here").

⁷In the 1724 booklet, the allegorical characters were labeled not as "Hoffnung" ("Hope") and "Furcht" ("Fear"), but "Zuversicht" ("Confidence/Hope") and "Schwachheit" ("Weakness/Fraility").

⁸In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks often of the reign of God or the realm of God as the "kingdom of heaven" (in the Luther Bibles, "Himmelreich"). In the original Greek of Luke 17:21, Jesus speaks of "the kingdom of God within/amid you," which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "das Reich Gottes ist inwendig in euch" ("the kingdom of God is internal in you").

Doch weil ich hier ein himmlisch Labsal habe,
 So sucht mein Geist hier seine Lust und Ruh,
 Mein Heiland ruft mir kräftig zu:
 “Mein Grab und Sterben bringt euch Leben,
 Mein Auferstehn ist euer Trost.”
 Mein Mund will zwar ein Opfer geben,
 Mein Heiland, doch wie klein,
 Wie wenig, wie so gar geringe
 Wird es vor dir, o grosser Sieger, sein,
 Wenn ich vor dich ein Sieg- und Danklied bringe.
 Hoffnung:
 Mein Auge sieht den Heiland auferweckt,
 Es hält ihn nicht der Tod in Banden.
 Furcht:
 Kein Auge sieht den Heiland auferweckt,
 Es hält ihn noch der Tod in Banden.
 Hoffnung:
 Wie, darf noch Furcht in einer Brust entstehn?
 Furcht:
 Lässt wohl das Grab die Toten aus?
 Hoffnung:
 Wenn Gott in einem Grabe lieget,
 So halten Grab und Tod ihn nicht.
 Furcht:
 Ach Gott! der du den Tod besieget,
 Dir weicht des Grabes Stein, das Siegel bricht,
 Ich glaube, aber hilf mir Schwachen,
 Du kannst mich stärker machen;
 Besiege mich und meinen Zweifelmüt,
 Der Gott, der Wunder tut,
 Hat meinen Geist durch Trostes Kraft gestärket,
 Dass er den auferstandnen Jesum merket.

5. Furcht:
 Ich fürchte zwar des Grabes Finsternissen
 Und klagete mein Heil sei nun entrissen.

But because I have heavenly refreshment here,
 My spirit seeks here its delight and rest;
 My savior emphatically calls to me:
 “My grave and death brings you [eternal] life;
 My resurrection is your comfort.”
 My mouth wants indeed to make an offering,
 My savior, but how small,
 How meager, how very slight
 Will it be before you, O great victor,
 When I bring a song of victory and thanks for you.
 Hope:
 My eye beholds the savior risen;
 Death holds him in bonds⁹ no longer.
 Fear:¹⁰
 No eye beholds the savior risen;
 Death holds him yet in bonds.
 Hope:
 What, may fear yet arise in any breast?
 Fear:
 Does the grave indeed let the dead out?
 Hope:
 If God lies in a grave,
 Then grave and death will not hold him.
 Fear:
 Ah, God, you who vanquishes death,
 The grave’s stone gives way to you, the seal breaks;
 I believe, but help me, a weakling;
 You can make me stronger.
 Vanquish me and my wavering [of belief];¹¹
 The God who works wonders
 Has strengthened my spirit by comfort’s power¹²
 So that it [my spirit] perceives the resurrected Jesus.

5. Fear:
 I may fear indeed the darknesses¹³ of the grave

⁹“Being held by death in bonds” perhaps refers not simply to being almost dead, but also to being ensnared by death as a personification of evil (as, e.g., in Jeremiah 9:20-21). The expression “death’s bonds” comes from Psalm 18:5, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Es umfingen mich des Todes Bande, und die Bäche Belial erschreckten mich” (“Death’s bonds beset me, and the [torrential] brooks of Belial [Satan] terrified me”). Luther and his followers took Psalm 18 to be speaking of the death of Jesus.

¹⁰See fn. 7, above.

¹¹“Zweifelmüt” can mean wavering generally, or wavering particularly in religious belief.

¹²In the 1724 booklet, this reads not “Trostes Kraft” (“comfort’s power”), but “Trost und Kraft” (“comfort and power”).

¹³The plural, “Finsternissen,” is presumably meant to refer to the two darknesses cited in Isaiah 29:32, “die Augen der Blinden werden aus dem Dunkel und Finsternis sehen” (“the eyes of the blind [i.e., a metaphor for the helpless] shall see out of the obscurity [i.e., spiritual murkiness] and darkness [i.e., blindness]”). Lutheran interpretation attached great importance to this passage as a prediction of God’s opening the eyes of the gentiles to belief in God and his messiah and divine son, Jesus.

Hoffnung:
Ich fürchte nicht des Grabes Finsternissen
Und hoffete mein Heil sei nicht entrissen.
Furcht und Hoffnung:
Nun ist mein Herze voller Trost,
Und wenn sich auch ein Feind erbost,
Will ich in Gott zu siegen wissen.

6. Alleluja! Alleluja! Alleluja!
Des solln wir alle froh sein,
Christus will unser Trost sein.
Kyrie eleis!¹⁷

And would lament that my salvation [Jesus] has now been
snatched away.¹⁴

Hope:
I may fear not the darknesses¹⁵ of the grave
And would hope that my salvation has not been snatched
away.

Fear and Hope:
Now my heart is full of comfort, [however,]
And even if an enemy rages,
I will know how to triumph in God.¹⁶

6. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Of this we should all be glad:
Christ wishes to be our comfort.
Lord, have mercy.

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV66> for an annotated translation

¹⁴The notion that an empty tomb of Jesus (as narrated in Matthew 28:1-8, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 23:1-12, and John 20:1-13) could signify that his body had been snatched away from the grave by his deceiving followers was an established charge in early polemical discussion of the claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead (as suggested, e.g., in Matthew 28:11-15).

¹⁵See fn. 13, above.

¹⁶According to the New Testament, it is through Christian faith that Fear and Hope “know how to triumph.” 1 John 5:4 reads “Alles, was von Gott geboren ist, überwindet die Welt; und unser Glaube ist der Sieg, der die Welt überwunden hat” (“All that is born of God overcomes the world; and our [Christian] faith is the victory that has overcome the world”).

¹⁷The final lines of “Christ ist erstanden.”