

“Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten” BWV 74

1. *Wer mich liebet, der wird mein Wort halten,  
und mein Vater wird ihn lieben, und wir werden  
zu ihm kommen und Wohnung bei ihm machen.*<sup>1</sup>

1. *Whoever loves me [Jesus], he will keep my word,<sup>2</sup> and  
[God] my father will love him, and we [God the father and I]  
will come to him and make [our] dwelling place in<sup>3</sup> him.<sup>4</sup>*

2. Komm, komm, mein Herze steht dir offen,  
Ach, lass es deine Wohnung sein!  
Ich liebe dich, so<sup>5</sup> muss ich hoffen:  
Dein Wort trifft<sup>6</sup> itzo<sup>7</sup> bei mir ein;  
Denn wer dich sucht, fürcht, liebt und ehret,  
Dem ist der Vater zugetan.  
Ich zweifle nicht, ich bin erhöret,  
Dass ich mich dein getrösten kann.<sup>8</sup>

2. Come, [Jesus], come, my [the believer's] heart stands open to you;  
Ah, let it be your dwelling place.<sup>9</sup>  
[If] I love you, then I must hope [all things]:<sup>10</sup>  
Your word [of salvation]<sup>11</sup> is now fulfilled for me;  
For whoever seeks, fears, loves, and honors you,  
[God] the father is inclined to him.  
I do not doubt [that, in my prayers], I am heard,<sup>12</sup>  
That I can place my hope and confidence<sup>13</sup> in you.

3. Die Wohnung ist bereit.  
Du findest ein Herz, das dir allein ergeben,  
Drum lass mich nicht erleben,<sup>14</sup>

3. The dwelling place [for you, Jesus, in my heart,] is ready.  
You will find a heart that [is spiritually] devoted to you alone;<sup>15</sup>  
Therefore let me not live to see

<sup>1</sup>John 14:23.

<sup>2</sup>In Lutheran interpretation, “to keep the word [of Jesus]” meant to accept, through the unmerited gift of faith, the gospel’s message of salvation in Christ.

<sup>3</sup>In this context the phrase “und Wohnung bei ihm machen,” strictly speaking, does not mean “and take up residence *with* him”—the German “bei” is used here more in the sense of “*in*” than of “*with*.” Movement 2 speaks of Jesus dwelling in the heart of the Christian believer.

<sup>4</sup>In libretto translations the second part of this verse is sometimes read as “We [*Christians*] will come unto *Him* [God] and make our abode with *Him* [with God, in heaven].” Although grammatically plausible, such a rendering cannot be right, as it wholly misconstrues the biblical context of John 14:23 and the ensuing contexts of the cantata libretto.

<sup>5</sup>In the poet’s 1728 printed version, “drum” (“therefore”). For another apparent “if–then” construction of this sort, see fn. 24, below

<sup>6</sup>In some modern renderings, “trifft bei mir ein” (“is fulfilled for me”) here has been printed as “trat bei mir ein” (“sets in with me”).

<sup>7</sup>In the poet’s 1728 printed version, not “itzo” (“now”) but “wirklich” (“truly”).

<sup>8</sup>In the poet’s 1728 printed version, “Wes ich mich süß getrösten kann” (“[Something] in which I can sweetly place my hope and confidence”); see also fn. 13, below.

<sup>9</sup>The heart is identified as the place where, through the believer’s faith, Christ dwells.

<sup>10</sup>The sense of this line most likely draws on 1 Corinthians 13:7, “Sie verträgt alles, sie glaubet alles, sie hoffet alles, sie duldet alles” (“It [Love] bears with all things, it believes all things, it hopes all things, it endures all things”).

<sup>11</sup>With regard to the “word” of salvation, see fn. 2, above.

<sup>12</sup>“Erhören” carries the sense of “to hear” in its special sense of “to listen to with compliance or assent,” often employed in situations of acceding to or granting a request or prayer.

<sup>13</sup>The reflexive “sich getrösten” is an older-German verb with several related meanings; in the context of this cantata movement it has the sense of “to place one’s hope and/or confidence in something/someone.”

Dass du gedenkst, von mir zu gehen,  
Das lass ich nimmermehr, ach, nimmermehr  
geschehen.

That you be minded to go [away] from me;  
That I will never,<sup>16</sup> ah, never allow to happen.

4. *Ich gehe hin, und komme wieder zu euch.  
Hättet ihr mich lieb, so würdet ihr euch freuen.*<sup>17</sup>

4. *I [Jesus] am going forth [to my father in heaven] and am  
coming back to you [followers on earth]. If you loved me, then you  
would rejoice [that I am going to the father].*

5. Kommt, eilet, stimmt Sait und Lieder<sup>18</sup>  
In muntern und erfreuten Ton.  
Geht er gleich weg, so kömmt er wieder,  
Der hochgelobte Gottes Sohn.  
Der Satan wird indes versuchen,  
Den Deinigen<sup>19</sup> gar sehr zu fluchen.  
Er ist mir hinderlich,  
So glaub ich, Herr, an dich.<sup>20</sup>

5. Come, hasten; sound out strings and songs  
In sprightly and joyous melody.<sup>21</sup>  
If he [Jesus] soon goes away, then he will [soon] come back,  
The highly extolled<sup>22</sup> son of God.  
Satan will, meanwhile, seek  
To very greatly curse those who belong to you [son of God].  
[If] he [Satan] is obstructive to me,<sup>23</sup>  
Then<sup>24</sup> I will [continue to] believe, Lord, in you.

<sup>14</sup>In the poet's 1728 printed version, "Drum lass mich nicht die Schmach erleben / Dass du gedenkst, von mir zu gehen" ("Therefore do not let me live to see the humiliation / That you be minded to go [away] from me").

<sup>15</sup>"Ein Herz, das dir allein ergeben [ist]" might seem straightforwardly to mean "a heart that is [‘emotionally’] offered to you alone," but it is more likely to mean "a heart that is [‘spiritually’; or, ‘in respect of teaching/doctrine’] devoted to you alone." Compare the language of Romans 6:17, "Gott sei aber gedankt, dass ihr Knechte der Sünde gewesen seid, aber nun gehorsam worden von Herzen dem Vorbilde der Lehre, welchem ihr ergeben seid" ("But thanks be to God that you [followers of Jesus] were servants of sin but [have] now become, from the heart, obedient to the model of teaching to which you are devoted"). It is worth noting, too, that in biblical language and Lutheran teaching, the heart was the seat of the emotions and the intellect.

<sup>16</sup>"Nimmermehr," here, does not mean "nevermore" in the sense of "never again" or "no longer" but in the sense of "never, ever."

<sup>17</sup>John 14:28.

<sup>18</sup>In the poet's 1728 printed version, "Auf! Stimmt die Saiten, tichtet Lieder" ("Up! Tune the strings, [and] fashion songs").

<sup>19</sup>"Den Deinigen" has sometimes been mistranscribed in modern editions as "dem Dreiein'gen," making the sense of the line out to be "[Satan will] very greatly curse the Trinity."

<sup>20</sup>In the poet's 1728 printed version, "Der Satan wird indes versuchen / Den Seinigen zu fluchen; / Ich aber glaub an dir, / Drum hat er gar kein Teil an mir. ("Satan will, meanwhile, seek / To curse those who belong to him [the highly extolled son of God]; / but I believe in you [Jesus], / [and] therefore he [Satan] has no part at all with me").

<sup>21</sup>"Ton" (plural, "Töne") means "tone" or "[musical] note" or "sound," but in older German it can also mean "tune" or "melody."

<sup>22</sup>"Hochgelobt" ("highly lauded," or "highly extolled") was an old-fashioned expression in Bach's day and was generally used only in connection with God. It is applied to Jesus in Acts 19:17, which reports that "der Name des HERRN Jesus ward hochgelobt" ("[in Ephesus] the name of the LORD Jesus was highly extolled"). Had the poet meant "The son of the highly extolled God," she would have written not "Der hochgelobte Gottes Sohn" but "Des hochgelobten Gottes Sohn." In Mark 16:4, Jesus is indeed called "der Sohn des Hochgelobten" ("the son of the Highly Extolled [God]").

<sup>23</sup>The idea that Satan "obstructs" those who pursue God's cause is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 2:18, where the apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Thessalonica that he, Silvanus, and Timothy would have come to meet with them but "Satan hat uns verhindert" ("Satan has obstructed us").

6. *Es ist nichts Verdammliches an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind.*<sup>25</sup>

6. *There is [with the gospel of salvation] nothing [eternally] condemnable against those who are in Christ Jesus.*<sup>26</sup>

7. Nichts kann mich erretten  
Von<sup>27</sup> höllischen Ketten  
Als, Jesu, dein Blut.  
Dein Leiden, dein Sterben  
Macht mich ja zum Erben:<sup>28</sup>  
Ich lache der Wut.<sup>29</sup>

7. Nothing can save me  
From chains of [darkness in] hell<sup>30</sup>  
Except your blood, Jesus.  
Your suffering, your dying [on the cross]  
Makes me indeed an heir [of eternal life];<sup>31</sup>  
I laugh at [Satan's] rage.

**8. Kein Menschenkind hier auf der Erd  
Ist dieser edlen Gabe wert,  
Bei uns ist kein Verdienen;  
Hier gilt gar nichts, als Lieb und Gnad,  
Die Christus uns verdienet hat  
Mit Büssen und Versöhnen.**<sup>32</sup>

**8. No child of humankind here on earth  
Is worthy of this precious<sup>33</sup> gift [of God's sending his Holy Spirit];<sup>34</sup>  
There is in us [innately] no meriting [of salvation].  
Here nothing at all counts except [God's] love and grace  
That Jesus has merited for us [on the cross]**

<sup>24</sup>Compare the syntactically similar construction of the phrasing at line 3 in movement 2: “Ich liebe dich, so muss ich hoffen” (“[If] I love you, then I must hope [all things]”), which likewise has a different wording in the poet’s 1728 printed version (see fn. 5 and fn. 20, above).

<sup>25</sup>Romans 8:1.

<sup>26</sup>The Olearius study Bible (which Bach, too, owned) says at Romans 8:1 that the sense of the expression “those who are in Christ Jesus” is explained in John 15:1-4, “Ich bin ein rechter Weinstock . . . Bleibet in mir, und ich in euch; gleich wie der Rebe kann keine Frucht bringen von ihm selber, er bleibe denn am Weinstock, also auch ihr nicht, ihr bleibet denn in mir” (“[Jesus] am a proper vine . . . [I say to you believers:] Remain in me, and I in you; just as the twig cannot bear fruit by itself unless it [the twig] remain on the vine, so neither can you [bear the spiritual fruit of salvation] unless you remain in me [via faith]”).

<sup>27</sup>In the poet’s 1728 printed version, “Vom höllischen Ketten” (literally, “From the chain of hell”).

<sup>28</sup>In the poet’s 1728 printed version, “Versetzt mich zum Erben” (“Translates/Makes me [into] an heir [of eternal life]”); see also fn. 31, below.

<sup>29</sup>In the poet’s 1728 printed version, “Drum lach ich der Wut” (“Therefore I laugh at the rage [of Satan]”).

<sup>30</sup>The expression “chains [of darkness] in hell” is derived from 2 Peter 2:4-9, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Denn so Gott der Engel, die gesündigt haben, nicht verschont hat, sondern hat sie mit Ketten der Finsternis zur Hölle verstossen, . . . der Herr weiss die Gottseligen aus der Versuchung zu erlösen” (“For if God did not spare the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell with chains of darkness, . . . [then] the Lord [also] knows [how] to redeem the godly from temptation”).

<sup>31</sup>The sense of this line is derived from Titus 3:5-7, “Er machte . . . durch Jesum Christum . . . dass wir . . . Erben seien des ewigen Lebens” (“He [God] made [it] . . . through Jesus Christ . . . that we . . . should be heirs of eternal life”).

<sup>32</sup>A stanza of “Gott Vater, sende deinen Geist.”

<sup>33</sup>The adjective “edel” often means “noble,” but it is also sometimes used as a synonym for “kostbar” (“precious”).

<sup>34</sup>The gift spoken of here is identified in the previous stanza of this hymn as God the father’s sending of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus (which is the subject of the liturgical occasion that this cantata was designed for, Day 1 of Pentecost, as narrated in its gospel portion, John 14:23-31, and also in its epistle portion, Acts 2:1-13). The biblical background for the related idea of God’s sending, via Jesus, the Holy Spirit more specifically as “the Comforter,” and thus a greatly “precious gift,” is a bit complicated but was well-known to Bach’s intended audiences. In John 16:7, Jesus says to his disciples, “Es ist

By [his] atoning and reconciling<sup>35</sup> [sinners with God].

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euch gut, dass ich hingehe; denn so ich nicht hingehe, so kömmt der Tröster nicht zu euch; so ich aber gehe, will ich ihn zu euch senden” (“It is good for you that I should go there [back to heaven, from where I came down to earth]; for if I should not go there, then the Comforter will not come to you; but if I should go, I will send him to you”). At the time of the writing of the Gospel of John, the Greek term “ho parakletos” (“the paraclete”), which Luther rendered as “the Comforter,” apparently carried a range of meanings, from “the [legal] advocate/helper” to “the [all-purpose] comforter/helper” (inclining, however, toward the legal connotation). Luther, following traditional interpretation since the time of the early postbiblical church fathers, took John’s term to be a title for the Third Person of the Trinitarian God, “the Holy Spirit.” John 14:26, part of the gospel portion for Day 1 of Pentecost, identified “the paraclete/Paraclete” with “the holy/Holy spirit/Spirit” who would be sent after Jesus had departed.

<sup>35</sup>“Versöhnen” is essentially an older-German spelling of “Versöhnen” (“reconciling,” “reaching a settlement”).