

“Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit” BWV 115

**1. Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit,
Wache, fleh und bete,
Dass dich nicht die böse Zeit
Unverhofft betrete;
Denn es ist
Satans List
Über viele Frommen
Zur Versuchung kommen.**

2. Ach schläfrige Seele, wie? ruhest du noch?
Ermuntre dich doch!
Es möchte die Strafe dich plötzlich erwecken
Und, wo du nicht wachest,
Im Schläfe des ewigen Todes bedecken.

3. Gott, so vor deine Seele wacht,
Hat Abscheu an der Sünden Nacht;
Er sendet dir sein Gnadenlicht
Und will vor diese Gaben,
Die er so reichlich dir verspricht,
Nur offne Geistesaugen haben.
Des Satans List ist ohne Grund,
Die Sünder zu bestriicken;
Brichst du nun selbst den Gnadenbund,
Wirst du die Hilfe nie erblicken.
Die ganze Welt und ihre Glieder
Sind nichts als falsche Brüder;
Doch macht dein Fleisch und Blut hiebei
Sich lauter Schmeichelei.

**4. Bete aber auch dabei
Mitten in dem Wachen!**

**1. Make yourself ready, my spirit;
Watch, plead, and pray,
Lest the evil time [of death's throes]
Should come upon you unexpectedly.
For Satan's cunning
Has assailed
Many pious ones
Unto the temptation [of faith wavering at that time].**

2. Ah, drowsy soul, what? do you still rest?
Just rouse yourself.
[Impending] punishment [death] may suddenly awaken [sin in]¹
you
And, unless² you watch [against sin], [the punishment will]
Enshroud [you] in the sleep of eternal death.

3. God, who watches over your soul,
Has revulsion against the night [i.e., darkness] of sin;
He sends you his light of grace
And [in return] for these gifts
That he so richly promises you
Wants only open eyes of the spirit.
The cunning of Satan is
To ensnare sinners, without cause;
If you now break the covenant of grace itself,³
You will never look upon salvation.
The whole world and its members
Are nothing but false brothers;
Yet your flesh and blood hereby [by this falseness]
Does itself pure flattery.

**4. But pray thereby,
Also in the midst of watching.**

GENERAL NOTE: Movements 1 and 6 take their texts verbatim from the outer stanzas of the hymn “Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit.” The remaining movements paraphrase the content of the inner stanzas.

¹The confusing and somewhat convoluted sense of lines 3–5 is derived from Luther's idiosyncratic rendering of Lamentations 1:14, “Meine schwere Sünden sind durch seine Strafe erwachet” (“My heavy sins are awakened through [the prospect of] his [God's] punishment [namely, my temporal death]”). Also relevant here is Revelation 3:3, as glossed in the Calov study Bible, which Bach owned; it reads “So du nicht wirst wachen, werde ich über dich kommen [‘mit meinem Particular-Gericht, Luc. XII.39’] wie ein Dieb [‘plötzlich und unverhofft’]” (“If you will not [keep] watch, I [Christ] will assail you [‘with my particular judgment, (cf.) Luke 12:39’]”) like a thief [‘suddenly and unexpected’]). “Particular judgment” is the divine judgment that a person faces immediately after death, followed by God's “general judgment” (or, “last judgment”) of all people at the end time.

²In older German, the expression “wo nicht” was a synonym for “wenn nicht” (“unless,” “if not”).

³“Gnadenbund” (“covenant of grace”), is a technical term that refers to the covenant of God with humankind regarding their eternal salvation. Lutherans often called the covenant of God with ancient Israel the “Werkbund” (“covenant of works”) because they considered this covenant to be more tied to the notion of the merit of external works in God's eyes, rather than to what they considered to be the New Testament's teaching of a “Gnadenbund” in which justification in God's eyes is merited only through the believer's acceptance of God's unmerited gift of Christian faith.

Bitte bei der grossen Schuld
Deinen Richter um Geduld,
Soll er dich von Sünden frei
Und gereinigt machen!

5. Er sehnet sich nach unserm Schreien,
Er neigt sein gnädig Ohr hierauf;
Wenn Feinde sich auf unsern Schaden freuen,
So siegen wir in seiner Kraft:
Indem sein Sohn, in dem wir beten,
Uns Mut und Kräfte schafft
Und will als Helfer zu uns treten.

**6. Drum so lasst uns immerdar
Wachen, flehen, beten,
Weil die Angst, Not und Gefahr
Immer näher treten;
Denn die Zeit
Ist nicht weit,
Da uns Gott wird richten
Und die Welt vernichten.**

Ask your judge,
In [the face of] your great guilt, for [his] patience,
That he shall make you
Cleansed, and free, from sin.

5. He longs for our crying out;
He inclines his merciful ear here to [our cries].
If enemies [should] rejoice at our adversity,
Then we [will] triumph in his [God's] strength,
In that his son, in whom we pray,
Gives us courage and strengths
And wants to come to us as helper/savior.

**6. Thus let us then always
Watch, plead, pray,
Because fear, distress, and danger
Come ever closer;
For the time
Is not distant
When God will judge us
And destroy the world.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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