

“Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats” BWV 42

1. Sinfonia

2. *Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats, da die Jünger versamlet und die Türen verschlossen waren aus Furcht für den Jüden, kam Jesus und trat mitten ein.*¹

3. Wo zwei und drei versamlet sind⁶
In Jesu teurem⁷ Namen,
Da stellt sich Jesus mitten ein⁸
Und spricht darzu das Amen.
Denn was aus Lieb und Not geschicht,

1. Sinfonia

2. *But² in the evening of that same “sabbath”/weekday³ [the Sunday⁴ after Jesus’s crucifixion], when the disciples gathered and the doors were locked for fear of the Jews,⁵ Jesus came and entered the [disciples’] midst.*

3. Where two and three are gathered
In Jesus’s precious name,
Then Jesus appears amidst [them]
And declares the “amen” to [their ritual].
For whatever [miracle] transpires out of love and need

¹John 20:19, a verse from the gospel portion chanted on the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was designed.

²This bit of biblical narrative starts with an adversative conjunction on account of the fact that it is contrasting Mary Magdalene’s having seen the resurrected Jesus (in the morning) with the disciples’ having seen the resurrected Jesus (later, in the evening of this same Sunday).

³Depending on context, the underlying Greek New Testament word “sabbaton” could refer either to (1) “a [weekly] day of [religious observance and] rest [from work],” or to (2) “a week,” or to (3) “a [numbered] day of the week.” This latter sense was the one employed in the biblical phrase “te mia ton sabbaton” (“the first of the ‘sabbaths’ [sense 3] [within a ‘sabbath’ (sense 2)]”), an elaborate way of connoting “Sunday” (e.g., Luke 24:1, Acts 20:7). The Greek of John 20:19 is not fully rendered in Luther’s German translation (which is the verbatim text for movement 2 of Bach’s cantata). The standard Greek wording in John (which does correspond to the Greek of Luther’s source, Erasmus’s 1519 edition of the New Testament) reads “ouses oun opsias te *hemera* ekeine, te mia *sabbaton*” (hyperliterally, “It being, therefore, evening/late to *the same ‘day,’* the first of the [seven] ‘*sabbaths*’ [in the week]). The pre-nineteenth-century Luther Bibles, however, read, just like Bach’s cantata, “But in the evening of *the same ‘sabbath’*.” It is unclear whether Luther’s shorter and subtly different rendering was meant to conflate sense 1 and sense 3 of “sabbaton”—his translation may have been motivated in part by a desire to make John 20:19 project the belief that Sunday is the sabbath in sense 1, the proper day of godly rest and worship for Christians (but on a spiritual, not a legal, basis), superseding Saturday, the traditional (Jewish) sabbath in sense 1 (the laws about which were held by Luther and his followers—but notably not by the followers of Calvin—to have been eliminated with the advent of Christ). The Gospel of John, both in its original Greek and in Luther’s translation, does indeed say that Jesus was seen raised from the dead on the first Sunday (see fn. 4, below) after his crucifixion on the Friday in Passover, but Sunday’s becoming the Christian sabbath (“day of rest”) developed well after the Gospel of John was written.

⁴Regarding the various biblical meanings of the word “sabbath,” see fn. 3 above. Contextually, the expression “that same sabbath” cannot be taken to connote “that same Saturday,” as is evident from Luther’s (albeit somewhat confusing) rendering of John 20:1, “An der Sabbather einem kommt Maria Magdalena frühe, da es noch finster war, zum Grabe, und siehet, dass der Stein vom Grabe hinweg war” (“Early [in the morning], when it was still dark, on [the ‘sabbath’/weekday that is reckoned as ordinal day number] one of the [seven] ‘sabbaths’/weekdays, Mary Magdalene came to the grave [of Jesus] and sees that the stone [that had sealed the tomb] was [taken] away from the grave”). If Mary sees Jesus on the morning of the first day in the week, then “the evening of that same ‘sabbath’/weekday” would be after sunset on a Sunday.

⁵The reason for this “fear of the Jews” was stated in John 16:2 to be: “Sie werden euch in den Bann tun; es kömmt aber die Zeit, dass, wer euch tötet, wird meinen, er tue Gott einen Dienst daran” (“They [the Jews] will place you [followers of Jesus] under the ban; but the time is coming that whoever [of the Jews] kills you will suppose he thereby does God a service”).

⁶This was given as “sei[e]n” (“may be”) in the text booklet distributed to Bach’s fellow congregants; this rhymes with the “ein” of “stellt sich ein” (“to make one’s appearance”) at the end of line 3. “Sind” is the wording in most Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, whereas “sein/seien” is used in others; see also fn. 8, below.

⁷This was given as “In Jesu teuren Namen” (strictly speaking, either singular accusative “into Jesus’s precious name,” or plural dative “in Jesus’s precious names”) in the text booklet distributed to Bach’s fellow congregants.

⁸Lines 1–3 of this movement were adapted from Matthew 18:20, where Jesus declares, “denn wo zwei oder drei versammelt sein [or, ‘sind’] in meinem Namen, da bin ich mitten unter ihnen” (“for where two or three may be [or, ‘are’] gathered in my name, I am there in the midst among them”).

Das bricht des Höchsten Ordnung nicht.

Does not [truly] transgress [God] the Most High's [created natural] order.⁹

**4. Verzage nicht, o Häuflein klein,
Obschon¹⁰ die Feinde willens sein,
Dich gänzlich zu verstören,
Und suchen deinen Untergang,
Davon dir wird recht angst und bang:
Es wird nicht lange währen.¹¹**

**4. Do not despair, oh tiny little band [of Christians],¹²
Although the enemies are willing¹³
To destroy¹⁴ you utterly
And [do] seek your downfall,
About which you will be quite anxious and afraid;
It [this anxiety and fear] will not last long.**

5. Man kann hiervon ein schön Exempel sehen
An dem, was zu Jerusalem geschehen;
Denn da die Jünger sich versammelt hatten
In¹⁵ finstern Schatten,
Aus Furcht für denen Jüden,
So trat mein Heiland mitten ein,
Zum Zeugnis, dass er seiner Kirche Schutz will
sein.
Drum lasst die Feinde wüten!

5. A beautiful [heralding] example of this [persecution and relief] can be seen
In what transpired at Jerusalem;
In what transpired at Jerusalem;
For when the disciples had gathered themselves
In¹⁶ [the] dark shadows [of evening],
For fear of the Jews,¹⁷
My savior then entered the [disciples'] midst,
As a sign that he wants to be his church's protection.
So let enemies rage!

6. Jesus ist ein Schild der Seinen,
Wenn sie die Verfolgung trifft.
Ihnen muss die Sonne scheinen,

6. Jesus is a shield¹⁹ of those who are his,
When persecution meets them.

⁹It is probably not God's concern with his ethical or ritual "laws" and "decrees" but rather with his true commitment, despite anomalies, to his created "natural order" that is being referred to here. The apparent twin unnaturalness of Jesus's rising from the dead and his placing himself into a locked room is not to be taken as a transgression of God's divinely-created order, declares this cantata poetry, as God's love for the followers of Jesus can transcend the laws of nature. These aria lines may be partly drawing on 1 Corinthians 14:33, "Denn Gott ist nicht ein Gott der Unordnung, sondern des Friedes, wie in allen Gemeinen der Heiligen" ("For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as [he is] in all congregations of the saints"), which is part of an extended passage about orderly Christian worship (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).

¹⁰This was given as "ob gleich," i.e., "obgleich" ("although") in the text booklet distributed to Bach's fellow congregants, and as "obgl." (i.e., "obgleich") in Bach's own score, but as "obschon" (which also means "although") in Bach's original performing parts.

¹¹The first stanza of this hymn.

¹²This use of the word "Häuflein" ("tiny little band") is drawing on the sense of the biblical expression "ihr armer Haufe Israel" ("you wretched/poor band, Israel") in Isaiah 41:14. In traditional Christian interpretation, the name of the people of God here, "Israel," was understood to mean "Christians," "the church."

¹³This line draws on the language of Psalm 27:12, "Gib mich nicht in den Willen meiner Feinde" ("Do not give me [over] unto the will of my enemies").

¹⁴In modern German, "verstören" means "to disturb" or "to unsettle," but in older German, especially in the Luther Bibles, "verstören" was often employed as a synonym for "zerstören" ("to crush," "to destroy").

¹⁵This was given as "Im finstern Schatten" (singular dative; strictly speaking, "In the dark shadow") in the text booklet distributed to Bach's fellow congregants.

¹⁶"In finstern Schatten" is presumably to be understood here as plural dative, "In den finstern Schatten" ("in the dark shadows"); not as singular accusative, "In den finstern Schatten" ("into the dark shadow"); nor as plural accusative, "In die finstern Schatten" ("into the dark shadows"). See also fn. 15, above.

¹⁷"Denen" is used here as an old-fashioned alternative form of "den" ("the"). With regard to the followers of Jesus fearing the Jews, see fn. 5, above.

¹⁹With regard to Jesus as not only a "shield" but also a "sun" (line 3), see fn. 20, below.

Mit der güldnen/schönen¹⁸ Überschrift:
Jesus ist ein Schild der Seinen,
Wenn sie die Verfolgung trifft.

On them the sun [the Lord, Jesus,]²⁰ must shine,
With the gilded/splendid superscription [above the Lord's
head]:
“Jesus is a shield of those who are his,
When persecution meets them.”

**7. Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich,
Herr Gott, zu unsern Zeiten;
Es ist doch ja kein anderer nicht,
Der für uns könnte streiten,
Denn du, unser Gott, alleine.**

**7. Grant us peace mercifully,
Lord God, in our times;²⁴
There is yet indeed not any other
Who could battle for us
Than you, our God, alone.**

**Gib unsern²¹ Fürsten und aller Obrigkeit
Fried und gut Regiment,
Dass wir unter ihnen
Ein geruhlich²² und stilles Leben führen mögen
In aller Gottseligkeit und Ehrbarkeit.²³
Amen.**

**Give our princes and all [secular] authority
Peace and good governance,
That under them [the authorities] we may lead
A tranquil and quiet life
In all godliness and honorability.²⁵
Amen.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV42> for an annotated translation

¹⁸Bach's own score and the text booklet distributed to his fellow congregants reads "güldnen" ("gilded"), but his separate performing part reads "schönen" ("beautiful/splendid").

²⁰The sense of this line is derived from Psalm 84:12, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Gott der HERR ist Sonn und Schild" ("God the LORD [i.e., in Christian reading, both God the father and God the son] is [a] sun and shield").

²¹This was given as "Gib unserm Fürsten" ("Give our prince") in the text booklet distributed to Bach's fellow congregants.

²²This movement is not underlaid with its hymn text in Bach's own score. In his original soprano, tenor, and bass performing parts, line 4 of the second stanza gives the word "geruhlich" ("tranquil"), the minority reading in 1 Timothy 2:2 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day (see its quotation in fn. 25, below), whereas the alto part and the text booklet distributed to Bach's fellow congregants gives "geruhig" (which likewise means "tranquil"), the majority reading in 1 Timothy 2:2 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day and the wording that is given in modern editions of the cantata.

²³Martin Luther's versification of the antiphon "Da pacem Domine," with an additional stanza added shortly after his lifetime.

²⁴These lines draw on the language of Luther's idiosyncratic rendering of Sirach 50:25-26, "Er [Gott] verleihe immerdar Friede zu unser Zeit in Israel, und dass seine Gnade stets bei uns bleibe" ("May he [God] in our time grant peace in Israel forever, and [may God also grant] that his mercy/grace might ever abide with us").

²⁵These lines draw extensively on 1 Timothy 2:1-2, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "für die Könige und für alle Obrigkeit, auf dass wir ein geruhiges [or, 'geruhliches'] und stilles Leben führen mögen in aller Gottseligkeit und Ehrbarkeit" ("[Make prayers and give thanks] for the kings and for all [secular] authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and honorability"). In older English, the equivalent of the German word "Ehrbarkeit" was "honesty," but in this case the word "honesty" was understood not in its sense of "truthfulness" but of "respectability/honorability."