



Die Klenden sollen essen

the seventy-fifth cantata by

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Bram Wayman, conductor

performed as part of the series

Bach's Lunch

Friday, February 6th, 2015

Grant Hall, room 122



— ✧ The performers ✧ —

Voices

Erin Lillie
SOPRANO

Anna Hoard
ALTO

Christopher Puckett
TENOR

Armando Contreras
BASS

Oboe

Jessica Cary
Kim Foskett

Trumpet

Charles Calloway

Violin

Ramiro Miranda
CONCERTMASTER

Marissa Carlson

Viola

Gabrielle Padilla

Violoncello

Ezgi Karakus

Harpsichord

Dr. Lee Thompson

Conductor

Bram Wayman

— ✧ About Bach's cantatas ✧ —

In general, a *cantata* is a set of movements that, together, tell a story. Unlike musicals or oratorios, where the story is contained entirely within the characters' world, cantatas include exposition and reflection from the storytellers' point of view.

The cantata has its roots in the early Baroque period in Italy, where it developed alongside other new dramatic forms. Early cantatas were mostly secular. It was in the hands of German Lutherans that the cantata became a primarily sacred form — and in the hands of one composer in particular.

Johann Sebastian Bach wrote some three hundred cantatas, about two hundred of which survive today. He composed most of them for the Church of St. Thomas, at which he began directing music in 1723. Each and every week, Bach composed a new cantata on the weekly Bible reading. They functioned something like a musical sermon: an artistic response to a pastor's discussion, and a personalized, expressive, and often dramatized approach to the scripture and lessons of the day.

Bach's cantatas involve many typical forms of the time: *arias* (solo songs

expressing a personal viewpoint), *recitatives* (essentially musical speech that is narrative or didactic), *choruses* and *chorales* (movements for multiple voices, often an embellishment of a hymn tune, or “chorale”), and occasionally *sinfonias* (introductory movements for orchestra).

— ✧ *About Die Elenden sollen essen* ✧ —

Bach’s new congregation at St. Thomas Church heard his music the very week he arrived. The first cantata he presented was BWV 75, *Die Elenden sollen essen*, or “The starving shall eat.”

Two passages of the Bible were read in church that Sunday, May 30th, 1723. The first was from the first Epistle of John (I John 4:16–21), an encouragement for the reader or listener to love God, and to understand that loving God meant loving one’s neighbor. The second was a parable from the book of Luke (Luke 16:19–31): the story of Dives and Lazarus, a rich man and a poor man. Lazarus begged unloved at Dives’ door for many years, receiving nothing but scraps. When both men died, Lazarus was taken to heaven, while Dives was sent to hell. Seeing Abraham far off in heaven, Dives begged him, “Send Lazarus to my family, to warn them about this place!” But Abraham refused. “They have Moses and the prophets to teach them,” he replied. “If that is not enough, they would never believe Lazarus, *even if he had risen from the dead.*” The reference to resurrection is unmistakable, a warning that all must make the effort to follow Christ despite the distractions of earthly life. *Die Elenden sollen essen* is a lesson on selflessness. Its first half deals with the vanity of earthly wealth, while its second half encourages us to find spiritual riches in the path of Christ. Just before the finale, the two concepts are linked: “O poverty, which no riches equal!” Earthly poverty opens the soul, so that a Christian poor also in spirit may feast at the table of God’s way, eating that they might be satisfied.

Die Elenden sollen essen is structured as a Baroque dance suite, a traditional set of dances of various types. It seems an unlikely pairing: laments of spiritual poverty being sung to sprightly dance tunes! Understanding Bach’s use of dance forms for his arias requires the listener to think as he did. Continental music in the Baroque era was strongly stylistically codified; to write in a dance form was typical, in the same way that most people today would expect a song to have a verse-refrain-bridge structure. In a high-pressure music ministry like St. Thomas of Leipzig, it was entirely typical for these soloistic songs to take

ordinary forms, the styles of which musicians understood natively and could rehearse easily. There are four dance forms in *Die Elenden sollen essen*, one for each of the arias. The tenor's aria is a *polonaise*, a stately dance identifiable by its characteristic short-short-long rhythm. The soprano sings a *minuet*, a slower dance in triple time (three steps to the measure). The alto's music is a *passepied*, something like a swift minuet with its emphasis on the first of every three steps. Finally, the bass sings a *gigue*, a dance with running triplet figures that was usually the capstone of a suite.

Each aria in *Die Elenden sollen essen* offers listeners a model emotional approach to the church's lesson of the day, sometimes contemplative, sometimes exultant. In between the arias, recitatives echo the message of the pastor in more objective words. An opening prelude-fugue choral movement sets the scene with a reinforcing message of hope: in its first half, sorrowful and searching lines represent humankind starving for God's grace and seeking the divine; in its second, the lines dance around each other in joy, a promise of the end to come, saying, "Your heart will live forever." The most celebrated music of this cantata is found in its three chorale movements: a *sinfonia* and two choral finales on the hymn tune "Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan" — "What God does is well done!"

— ✧ · Text and translation · ✧ —

PART I

1. Chorale (chorus)

Die Elenden sollen essen,
dass sie satt werden,
und die nach dem Herrn fragen,
werden ihn preisen.
Euer Herz soll ewiglich leben.

*The starving shall eat,
that they will be satisfied,
and they that seek the Lord
will praise him.
Your heart will live forever.*

2. Recitative (bass)

Was hilft des Purpurs Majestät,
da sie vergeht?
Was hilft der größte Überfluss,

*What value are riches and majesty,
since they die away?
What value is the greatest
abundance,*

weil alles, so wir sehen,
verschwinden muss?
Was hilft der Kitzel eitler Sinnen,
denn unser Leib muss selbst von
hinnen?
Ach, wie geschwind ist es
geschehen,
dass Reichtum, Wollust, Pracht
den Geist zur Hölle macht!

3. **Aria** (tenor)

Mein Jesus soll mein alles sein!
Mein Purpur ist sein teures Blut,
er selbst mein allerhöchstes Gut,
und seines Geistes Liebesglut
mein allersüßster Freudenwein.

4. **Recitative** (tenor)

Gott stürzet und erhöht
in Zeit und Ewigkeit.
Wer in der Welt den Himmel
sucht,
wird dort verflucht.
Wer aber hier die Hölle überstehet,
wird dort erfreut.

5. **Aria** (soprano)

Ich nehme mein Leiden mit
Freuden auf mich.
Wer Lazarus' Plagen geduldig
ertragen,
den nehmen die Engel zu sich.

6. **Recitative** (soprano)

Indes schenkt Gott ein gut
Gewissen,
dabei ein Christe kann ein kleines
Gut
mit großer Lust genießen.

when all that we see must vanish?

*What value are vain desires,
since our bodies must go from here?*

*Ah, how swiftly it happens,
that riches, pleasure, lust
lead the spirit to Hell!*

*My Jesus will be all to me!
My riches are his precious blood,
he himself my highest good,
and his spirit's ember of love
my sweetest wine of joy.*

*God casts down and lifts up
in time and eternity.
Those who seek their heaven in the
world
will be cursed there.
But those who overcome hell here
will rejoice there.*

*I take my suffering upon myself with
joy.
Whoever patiently bears Lazarus'
torments
will be taken in by the angels.*

*Meanwhile, God bestows a good
conscience,
by which a Christian can enjoy a
small good
with great pleasure.*

Ja, führt er auch durch lange Not
zum Tod,
so ist es doch am Ende wohlgetan.

*Yes, though we are led through long
suffering to death,
yet it is, in the end, well done.*

7. Chorale (chorus)

Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan!
Muß ich den Kelch gleich
schmecken,
der bitter ist nach meinem Wahn,
laß ich mich doch nicht schrecken,
weil doch zuletzt ich werd ergötzt
mit süßem Trost im Herzen;
da weichen alle Schmerzen.

*What God does is well done!
If I must drink from the cup,
the bitterness of which is but an
illusion,
I will not let myself be frightened,
since in the end I will delight
with sweet comfort in my heart;
then all suffering will cease.*

PART II

8. Sinfonia (orchestra)

9. Recitative (alto)

Nur eines kränkt ein christliches
Gemüte:
wenn es an seines Geistes Armut
denkt.
Es gläubt zwar Gottes Güte,
die alles neu erschafft;
doch mangelt ihm die Kraft,
dem überirdischen Leben
das Wachstum und die Frucht zu
geben.

*Only one thing aggrieves a
Christian's conscience:
when they think how poor they are in
spirit.
Indeed, they trust God's goodness,
which makes all things new,
but they lack the power
to grant the supernatural life
increase and fruit.*

10. Aria (alto)

Jesus macht mich geistlich reich.
Kann ich seinen Geist empfangen,
will ich weiter nichts verlangen;
denn mein Leben wächst zugleich.

*Jesus makes me spiritually rich.
If I can embrace his spirit,
I will long for nothing more;
then my life will likewise increase.*

11. Recitative (bass)

Wer nur in Jesu bleibt,

Who abides in Jesus alone,

die Selbstverleugnung treibt,
dass er in Gottes Liebe
sich gläubig übe,
hat, wenn das Irdische
 verschwunden,
sich selbst und Gott gefunden.

*who is driven by self-denial
which he, in God's love,
faithfully practices,
has, when this earthly life has
 vanished,
found himself and God.*

12. Aria (bass)

Mein Herze glaubt und liebt.
Denn Jesu süße Flammen,
aus den' die meinen stammen,
gehn über mich zusammen,
weil er sich mir ergibt.

*My heart believes and loves.
For Jesus' sweet flames,
out of which my own arise,
sweep over me completely,
because he has given them to me.*

13. Recitative (tenor)

O Armut, der kein Reichtum
 gleicht!
wenn aus dem Herzen die ganze
 Welt entweicht
und Jesus nur allein regiert.
So wird ein Christ zu Gott geführt!
Gib, Gott, dass wir es nicht
 verscherzen!

*O poverty, which no riches equal!

when from the heart the whole world
 departs,
and only Jesus reigns alone.
So will a Christian be led to God!
Grant, God, that we do not squander
 this!*

14. Chorale (chorus)

Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan!
Dabei will ich verbleiben.
Es mag mich auf die rauhe Bahn

Not, Tod und Elend treiben;
so wird Gott mich ganz väterlich
in seinen Armen halten;
drum laß ich ihn nur walten.

*What God does is well done!
By this I will remain.
It may be that I am driven on the
 rough road
by suffering, death, and misery;
yet God, all-fatherly, will
hold me in his arms;
therefore I let only him rule over me.*



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—✧ Upcoming *Bach's Lunch* performances ✧—

Join us for the final concerts in the Bach's Lunch series this season! All performances are at noon in Grant Hall, room 122. Bring your lunch, bring a friend, and enjoy!

- ♦ March 13th, 2015: *Jesu, der du meine Seele* (BWV 78)
John McDonald, conductor
- ♦ April 24th, 2015: *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen* (BWV 103)
Tony Ward, conductor

Our performance of *Die Elenden sollen essen* will last about forty minutes. Thank you for turning completely off all electronic devices during the performance.

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