

BWV 101 - "Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott" Cantata for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Choral lyrics in italics

1. Choral

*Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott,
Die schwere Straf und große Not,
Die wir mit Sünden ohne Zahl
Verdienen allzumal.
Behüt für Krieg und teurer Zeit,
Für Seuchen, Feur und großem Leid.*

2. Arie T

Handle nicht nach deinen Rechten
Mit uns bösen Sündenknechten,
Laß das Schwert der Feinde ruhn!
Höchster, höre unser Flehen,
Daß wir nicht durch sündlich Tun
Wie Jerusalem vergehen!

3. Choral und Rezitativ S

*Ach! Herr Gott, durch die Treue dein
Wird unser Land in Fried und Ruhe sein.
Wenn uns ein Unglückswetter droht,
So rufen wir,
Barmherzger Gott, zu dir
In solcher Not:
Mit Trost und Rettung uns erschein!
Du kannst dem feindlichen Zerstören
Durch deine Macht und Hilfe wehren.
Beweis an uns deine große Gnad
Und straf uns nicht auf frischer Tat,
Wenn unsre Füße wanken wollen
Und wir aus Schwachheit straucheln sollten.
Wohn uns mit deiner Güte bei
Und gib daß wir
Mur nach dem Guten streben,
Damit allhier
Und auch in jenem Leben
Dein Zorn und Grimm fern von uns sei.*

4. Arie mit instrumental Choral B

*Warum willst du so zornig sein?
Es schlagen deines Eifers Flammen
Schon über unserm Haupt zusammen.
Ach stelle doch die Strafen ein
Und trag aus väterlicher Huld
Mit unserm schwachen Fleisch Geduld!
Warum willst du so zornig sein?
Über uns arme Würmelein?
Weißt du doch wohl, du treuer Gott,
daß wir nichts sind als Erd und Kot;
es ist ja vor dein Angesicht
Unser Schwachheit verborgen nicht.*

1. Chorale

*Take from us, Lord, O faithful God,
The severe punishment and great distress,
which we, for countless sins,
have altogether deserved.
Protect us from war and famine,
from contagion, fire, and grievous pain.*

2. Tenor Aria

Do not deal according to your law
with us wicked servants of sin
let the sword of the enemy rest!
Almighty, hear our pleading,
that we may not through sinful conduct
perish like Jerusalem.

3. Soprano Chorale and Recitative

*Ah! Lord God, through your faithfulness,
shall our land abide in peace and quiet.
When a storm of misfortune threatens,
we shall call,
merciful God, to You
in such suffering:
appear to us with comfort and deliverance!
You can ward off the enemy's destruction
through your power and help.
Let your great mercy appear to us
and do not punish us in the very act,
when our feet wish to be unwavering
but we stumble out of weakness.
Dwell among us with Your goodness
and grant that we
strive only after goodness,
so that here
and also in the life to come
your anger and wrath be far from us.*

4. Bass Aria + instrumental Chorale

*Why would you be so angry?
The flames of your zeal strike
Together, even now, over our heads.
Ah, cease the punishment
and with fatherly grace
be patient with our weak flesh!
Why would you be so angry
Against us poor little worms?
For You know well, loving God,
that we are nothing but earth and dung;
indeed before your face
our weakness is not hidden.*

V1
Jer 14.7
Though our
iniquities
testify against
us, act, O Lord,
for they
name's sake

V2
Paraphrase

Luke 19:41-48

V3

Dan. 9.16 O
Lord,
according to
all thy
righteous acts,
let thy anger
and thy wrath
(Luther: *Zorn
und Grimm*)
turn away
from thy city
Jerusalem.

V4 paraphrase

Unsung
chorale verse

5. Choral und Rezitativ T

Die Sünd hat uns verderbet sehr.
 So müssen auch die Frömmsten sagen
 Und mit betrännten Augen klagen:
Der Teufel plagt uns noch viel mehr.
 Ja, dieser böse Geist,
 Der schon von Anbeginn ein Mörder heißt,
 Sucht uns um unser Heil zu bringen
 Und als ein Löwe zu verschlingen.
Die Welt, auch unser Fleisch und Blut
Uns allezeit verführen tut.
 Wir treffen hier auf dieser schmalen Bahn
 Sehr viele Hindernis im Guten an.
Solch Elend kennst du, Herr, allein:
 Hilf, Helfer, hilf uns Schwachen,
 Du kannst uns stärker machen!
Ach, laß uns dir befohlen sein.

6. Arie (Duett) S A

Gedenk an Jesu bittern Tod!
 Nimm, Vater, deines Sohnes Schmerzen
 Und seiner Wunden Pein zu Herzen,
Die sind ja für die ganze Welt
Die Zahlung und das Lösegeld;
 Erzeig auch mir zu aller Zeit,
 Barmherzger Gott, Barmherzigkeit!
 Ich seufze stets in meiner Not:
 Gedenk an Jesu bittern Tod!

7. Choral

Leit uns mit deiner rechten Hand
Und segne unser Stadt und Land;
Gib uns allzeit dein heiliges Wort,
Behüt für's Teufels List und Mord;
Verleih ein selges Stündlein,
Auf daß wir ewig bei dir sein.

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Nimm von uns, Herr, du treur Gott, BWV 101, is a chorale cantata first performed on August 13, 1724, the tenth Sunday after Trinity. The gospel for the day is Luke 19:41-48, in which Jesus prophesizes the destruction of Jerusalem. Also read in Leipzig on this Sunday was the account of the Roman historian Josephus of the actual destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. So the mood for the tenth Sunday after Trinity is somber.

Theological background

The anonymous libretto, based on intact and paraphrased verses of the eponymous chorale, explores the dual nature of God—his anger and his mercy. Throughout it the Faithful pray that God withhold his righteous fury and be lenient with sinners. The chorale text by Martin Moller, written in 1584 during one of Europe's many plagues, is a free translation of the Latin poem *Aufer immensam, Deus, aufer iram* ("Turn aside, O Lord, Thy boundless wrath"), a text that may well date to plague times of the Middle Ages.

5. Tenor Chorale and Recitative

Sin has greatly corrupted us.
 Even the most virtuous must say as much
 and with tear-stained eyes lament:
The devil torments us even more.
 Yes, this evil spirit—
 who from the beginning was a murderer
 seeks to deprive us of our salvation
 and like a lion devour us.
The world, even our flesh and blood,
constantly lead us astray.
 We encounter here on this narrow path
 So many obstacles to goodness.
Such misery You alone, Lord, know:
 Help, o Helper, help us weak ones,
 You can strengthen us!
Ah, let us be entrusted to you.

V5 with tropes

1 Jn 5.8 he
 who commits
 sin is of the
 devil, for the
 devil has
 sinned from
 the beginning

6. Soprano-Alto Aria (Duet)

Remember Jesus' bitter death!
 Take, o Father, Your Son's suffering
 and the pain of His wounds to heart,
They are after all, for the whole world,
The payment and the ransom;
 show me, too, at all times,
 merciful God, mercy!
 I sigh constantly in my distress:
 Remember Jesus' bitter death!

V6 paraphrase

Mt 20.20 The
 Son of Man
 came not to be
 served but to
 serve and to
 give his life as
 a ransom
 (Luther:
Bezahlang)

7. Chorale

Lead us with Your right hand
and bless our city and land;
Grant us, at all times, your holy word,
Protect from the devil's guile and murder;
Grant us a blessed hour-of-death,
So that we may be forever with You!

V7

Eph 6.11 Put
 on the whole
 armor of God
 that you may
 be able to
 stand against
 the devil.

prescriptions belong to a later era—and the basic beat remains the same. In the *vivace* measures, the oboes play furiously—16th note runs, sometimes in parallel and sometimes as if chasing each other. In the *andante* measures, the oboes play eighth-note sighs, the pleading of sinners. Through fury and pleading, the bass sings over and over the opening line of verse 4 of the chorale text: “Why would you be so angry?” The alterations culminate in an amazingly dramatic cadence—here the *adagio* does indeed indicate a slower beat—and then the *vivace* fury erupts all over again. In the second section of the aria, almost all *andante*, the oboes play the chorale in three-part harmony. The well-versed in the congregation would have heard the unsung text—“Why would you be so angry with us poor little worms? You know well that we are but earth and dung”—simultaneously with the bass voice pleading with God: “Ah, cease the punishment and with fatherly grace have patience with us.”

On either side of the fury aria are movements with the chorale tune and text intact but interrupted by recitatives with tropes commenting on the chorale text.

The physical center of the cantata may be the fury aria, but the emotional center is the sixth movement, the double duet for soprano-alto and flute-English horn. The other verses of the libretto all explore God’s response to human sin: simultaneous wrath and mercy. The sixth verse brings in the Passion, the true center of Bach’s Lutheranism. We hear a gentle *Siciliano* rhythm in the continuo under the flute and English horn who play the first and fourth lines of the chorale melody in counterpoint with intricate rising and falling lines.



The voices repeat these melodic lines and add the descending chromatic scale that Bach traditionally associates with the Passion. In the first section, the chromatic line descends on the word “pain”; in the second, on the words “merciful God.”

I hear in this chorale and delicate counterpoint leading to the Passion motif an extended metaphor for Luther’s teaching that “sin is not taken away except in grace.”

The cantata ends with the final verse of Moller’s text: the Faithful pray that their city be blessed (*i.e.* not destroyed like Jerusalem) and that they may soon enter their “blessed little hour,” the hour of their death.

Tonal allegory

Modal shifts

Eric Chafe* discusses modal shifts as a 17th century device to mirror the concept of God's dualism, particularly his wrathful and merciful aspects. Chafe's example of this allegorical device is exactly the chorale that Bach inserts into the opening chorus: *Dies sind die heil'gen zehn gebot*, the Ten Commandments.

Diess sind die heil' - gen zeh'n Ge - bot', die uns gab un - ser Her - re Gott durch
 Mo - se, sei - nen Die - ner treu, hoch auf dem Berg Si - na - i. Ky - rie e - leis'.

He points out that the chorale begins in the Mixolydian mode (G major scale with a lowered seventh) as it introduces the commandments (“These are the holy ten commandments/that our Lord God gave to us/through Moses, his faithful one/high on Mount Sinai”) and ends in a transposed Dorian (minor mode) for the *Kyrie eleison*. In terms of tonal allegory, the major mode (*durus* or hard) represents God's wrathful side and the minor mode (*mollis* or soft) his merciful side.

In the opening movement of BWV 101, Bach sets only the first line of the chorale for the orchestral motif, but he makes the major/minor shift through the use of a lowered or raised third step:

Violin 1, mm 1-3, minor mode

Continuo, mm 22-24, major mode ascending, minor mode descending

6 5 4 9 3 7

Bach, steeped in 17th century tonality, surely intended these shifting modes as well as the shifting major-minor harmonies as allegory for the divine anger-mercy dialectic that is the theological core of this cantata.

* *Analyzing Bach Cantatas*, pp 161ff.

Gospel for the Day Luke 19: 41-48 (Luther Bibel 1545 and KJV)

41 Und als er nahe hinzukam, sah er die Stadt an und weinete über sie

41 And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it

42 und sprach: Wenn doch auch du erkennstest zu dieser deiner Zeit, was zu deinem Frieden dient! Aber nun ist's vor deinen Augen verborgen

42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

43 Denn es wird die Zeit über dich kommen, daß deine Feinde werden um dich und deine Kinder mit dir eine Wagenburg schlagen, dich belagern und an allen Orten ängsten

43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side

44 und werden dich schleifen und keinen Stein auf dem andern lassen, darum daß du nicht erkannt hast die Zeit, darin du heimgesucht bist.

44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation

From Flavius Josephus, The Wars of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem (ca 75 CE)

... Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as they were of the greatest eminence.... but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground ... that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. ... And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now become desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judaea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. ... The slaughter within was even more dreadful than the spectacle from without. Men and women, old and young, insurgents and priests, those who fought and those who entreated mercy, were hewn down in indiscriminate carnage. The number of the slain exceeded that of the slayers. ...