

Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ (Alone towards you, Lord Jesus Christ)

Chorale Cantata for the 13th Sunday after Trinity, first performed September 3, 1724

Text and Translation

The first three verses of the chorale are by Konrad Hubert; the fourth verse is an anonymous doxology. Movement 1 is Verse 1, movements 2 and 3 are based on verse 2; movements 4 and 5 are based on verse 3; movement 6 is verse 4. The English is based on Francis Browne's translation (August 2002) with adjustments from Melvin Unger's literal translations. Chorale texts are in purple, scriptures in green.

1 Chorus (Chorale) SATB, Oboe I/II, Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo

<p>Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, Mein Hoffnung steht auf Erden; Ich weiß, daß du mein Tröster bist, Kein Trost mag mir sonst werden. Von Anbeginn ist nichts erkorn, Auf Erden war kein Mensch geborn, Der mir aus Nöten helfen kann. Ich ruf dich an, Zu dem ich mein Vertrauen hab.</p>	<p>Towards you alone, Lord Jesus Christ, my hope on earth looks; I know that you are my comforter, There can be no other comfort for me. From the beginning nothing has been decreed, no man was born on earth who can help me out of my troubles. I call to you in whom I put my trust.</p>	<p>Chorale vs 1 Faith is a gift from Christ but we must ask for it.</p>
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2 Recitative Bass Continuo

<p>Mein Gott und Richter, willst du mich aus dem Gesetze fragen, So kann ich nicht, Weil mein Gewissen widerspricht, Auf tausend eines sagen. An Seelenkräften arm und an der Liebe bloß, Und meine Sünd ist schwer und übergroß; Doch weil sie mich von Herzen reuen, Wirst du, mein Gott und Hort, Durch ein Vergebungswort Mich wiederum erfreuen.</p>	<p>My God and judge, if you were to question me by the law, then I am unable—since my conscience contradicts me—to answer one time out of a thousand. In my soul's strength I am weak, and in my love bare, and my sin is heavy and too great; but since I regret my sins from my heart, you will, my God and refuge, through your word of forgiveness give me joy again.</p>	<p>Job 9:3 If one wished to contend with God, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. Chorale vs 2. My sins are heavy and too great/and I regret them from my heart <i>Explicatio of the epistle:</i> The Law makes me aware of my sins BUT I know that if I repent, God's forgiveness brings me joy.</p>
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3 Aria [Alto] Violino I con sordino, Violino II, Viola, Continuo

<p>Wie furchtsam wankten meine Schritte, Doch Jesus hört auf meine Bitte Und zeigt mich seinem Vater an. Mich drückten Sündenlasten nieder, Doch hilft mir Jesu Trostwort wieder, Daß er für mich genung getan.</p>	<p>How fearfully falter my footsteps, but Jesus listens to my plea and bears witness for me to his Father. The burden of my sins weighed me down, but Jesus' word of comfort helps me, that which he has done is enough for me.</p>	<p>Meditation: I falter BUT Jesus listens and bears witness to God, and that is enough for me. Chorale vs 2. And show to your Father/that you have done enough for me</p>
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4 Recitative Tenor Continuo

<p>Mein Gott, verwirf mich nicht—Wiewohl ich dein Gebot noch täglich übertrete— Von deinem Angesicht! Das kleinste ist mir schon zu halten viel zu schwer; Doch, wenn ich um nichts mehr Als Jesu Beistand bete, So wird mich kein Gewissensstreit Der Zuversicht berauben; Gib mir nur aus Barmherzigkeit Den wahren Christenglauben! So stellt er sich mit guten Früchten ein Und wird durch Liebe tätig sein.</p>	<p>My God, do not cast me away—though every day I still transgress (your commandments)—from your face! The smallest thing is far too difficult for me to keep; but if I pray for nothing more than Jesus' assistance, no conflict of conscience can rob me of my confidence. Only give me, out of your mercy true Christian faith! This (faith) is apparent in good fruits and will be active through love.</p>	<p>Psalm 51.11 Do not cast me from your presence/or take your Holy Spirit from me.</p> <p>Judged by the Law, humans fail BUT faith yields good deeds.</p> <p>Chorale vs 3. Give me through your compassion/ true Christian faith</p>
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5 Aria (Duet) Tenor, Bass Oboe III, Continuo

<p>Gott, der du die Liebe heißt, Ach, entzünde meinen Geist, Laß zu dir vor allen Dingen Meine Liebe kräftig dringen! Gib, daß ich aus reinem Triebe Als mich selbst den Nächsten liebe; Stören Feinde meine Ruh, Sende du mir Hülfe zu!</p>	<p>God, you who are called love, ah, enkindle my spirit, towards you before everything else let my love strongly push its way! Grant that, out of a pure impulse, I may love my neighbor as myself. If enemies disturb my peace, then send me your help!</p>	<p>Meditation on Luke 10:27 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself.</p> <p>Chorale vs 3. Before all things (may I) love you/ and my neighbor as myself.</p>
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6 Chorale SATB Oboe I e Violino I col Soprano, Oboe II e Violino II coll'Alto, Viola col Tenore, Continuo

<p>Ehr sei Gott in dem höchsten Thron, Dem Vater aller Güte, Und Jesu Christ, sein'm liebsten Sohn, Der uns allzeit behüte, Und Gott dem Heiligen Geiste, Der uns sein Hülff allzeit leiste, Damit wir ihm gefällig sein, Hier in dieser Zeit Und folgend in der Ewigkeit.</p>	<p>Honor be to God on the highest throne, to the Father of all goodness and to Jesus Christ, his dearest Son, who always protects us, and to God the Holy Spirit, who always supports us with his help, so that we may be pleasing to him. here in this time and thereafter in eternity.</p>	<p>Chorale vs 4.</p>
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Commentary

BWV 33, *Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ (Alone towards you, Lord Jesus Christ)* is a chorale Cantata composed for the 13th Sunday after Trinity in 1724. The chorale text by Konrad Hubert was published in 1540; the melody is from a secular song, *Eyn schön Lied*, first published in 1541. BWV 33 is Bach's only setting of this chorale in a cantata; two harmonizations are in his book of Chorales and a prelude is in the Neumeister Collection.

The epistle for the 13th Sunday after Trinity (Galatians 3:15-22) sets up the opposition of Law versus Gospel. Paul assures the Galatians that Mosaic Law did not nullify God's earlier Promise to Abraham—that his offspring would be blessed—but rather serves only to remind humans of their transgressions. God's promise of redemption is available to all through faith in Abraham's offspring, who is Christ.

The gospel for the day (Luke 10: 23-37) illustrates the two great commandments (“**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and, Love your neighbor as yourself**”) with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

1. **Opening chorus.** Bach sets the stage for his exegesis of the lessons of the day with a chorale fantasy in which the vocal chorale is embedded in a thematically independent *concertante* orchestra. Intended or not, this structure can be heard as an extended metaphor of the Church and the Faithful surrounded by God's eternal time. The orchestral motifs—ascending and descending 16th notes, leaps and syncopations, repeated 8ths notes—set the upper voices in opposition to the continuo. The chorale proceeds line by line with the *cantus firmus* in the soprano and the lower voices set alternatively as imitative polyphony or chromatic and diatonic harmonies moving in sync with the soprano. The text focuses on the human hope for salvation and faith that Christ will answer one's call for help. In the next-to-last line (“I call to thee”), Bach sets the inner two voices in parallel harmonies while the soprano and bass sustain their “call” above and below the moving lines. Another line where Bach's

setting emphasizes Lutheran doctrine is the first line of the Abgesang, “From the beginning nothing has been ordained,” where the lower voices emphasize “nichts,” reminding listeners that Lutherans, unlike Calvinists, can effect their own destinies.

2. **Recitative.** The bass recitative, the *explicatio* for the epistle of the day, opens with a reference to human frailty under Mosaic Law (**Job 9:3, “If one wished to contend with God, one could not answer him once in a thousand times”**) and continues with human despair in recognition of sin. At the quotation from the second verse of the chorale (**My sins are heavy and too great/and I regret them from my heart**), the emphasis turns from sin and the law toward repentance and Bach sets the with the resulting joy to an arioso with an extended melisma on “joy.”
3. **Aria.** The alto *da capo* aria is a meditation on human fear calmed through faith. The motif—leaps, turns, abrupt descents—is introduced by muted first violins accompanied by pizzicato lower strings. Bach sets the first line of the text, “How fearfully my footsteps falter” to this motif and shifts the mood from timidity to steady confidence for the second line, “but Jesus listens and bears witness to the Father.” The B section makes a similar mood shift with a variation of the motif for the “sin-burden” to the smoother line for Jesus’ “comfort-word.”
4. **Recitative.** The tenor recitative begins with fear of the possibility of losing God (**Psalm 51.11 “Do not cast me from your presence/or take your Holy Spirit from me”**) and agony in the understanding of falling short of the law. The turning comes at the prayer—a direct quote from verse 3 of the chorale (**Give me through your compassion/ true Christian faith**)—which Bach sets to a smoother line followed by broken major chords to celebrates the result of faith: good deeds through love.
5. **Aria.** The tenor-bass duet is a meditation on the two great commandments of Luke 10:27. Two oboes introduce the theme of sustained parallel thirds and sixths followed by

lively imitative patterns. The text paraphrases two lines from verse 3 of the chorale (*Before all things (may I) love you/ and my neighbor as myself*), and Bach sets the tenor and bass to echo the oboe motif—except that the vocal imitations are canons, while the two oboes continue their free imitations. For each full phrase of text, then, the voices sing first in parallel, then in canon, and finally end together, on the unison or the octave. The exception is the last pair of lines Bach sets the first of the lines— “If my enemies disturb my rest”—to a canon with a tritone leap followed marked repeated notes and follows that— “then send me your help”—with sustained unisons that dissolve to dissonant seconds before resolving finally to a third. The final line is set to the parallel thirds of the earlier passages ending on a unison. One could interpret this entire aria as a theological message: loving God and one’s neighbor brings harmony, but fulfilling those two commandments is not easy—one is continually falling out of step. The endings of the phrases—unison, octave, third—are a sign that, however difficult, loving God and one’s neighbor is, in the end, doable.

6. **Chorale.** (Stollen-stollen-abgesang). The doxology brings the theme of Law versus Gospel to an affirmation of the Lutheran belief that, however great one’s sins, one can become pleasing to God through faith. Bach’s harmonization reflects the tonal ambiguity of the original melody with a constant shifting between archaic modality and 18th century diatonic/chromatic harmony. At the end—the short phrase “here in this time,” followed by the extended phrase, “and thereafter in eternity,” brings us back to the dual time concepts of Bach’s time: God’s timelessness encompassing mortal time.

Readings for the 13th Sunday after Trinity (New Revised Standard Version)

Galatians 3:15-22: The Promise to Abraham and the Purpose of the Law

Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person’s will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, ‘And to offsprings’, as of many; but it says, ‘And to your offspring’, that is, to one person, who is Christ. My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Luke 10:23-37 The Two Great Commandments and the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.’

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’