

BWV 67 Halt' im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ, cantata for the first Sunday after Easter

1. CORO

Halt' im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ der
 auferstanden ist von den Toten

Hold in memory Jesus Christ who is
 risen from the dead.

2 Tim 2.8 Remember
 Jesus Christ risen
 from the dead

2. ARIA TENORE

Mein Jesus ist erstanden,
 allein, was schreckt mich noch?
 Mein Glaube kennt des Heilands Sieg
 doch fühlt mein Herze Streit und Krieg,
 mein Heil, erscheine doch!

My Jesus is risen,
 then why am I still afraid?
 My faith recognizes the savior's victory,
 yet my heart sees only battle and war.
 My savior, please appear!

Faith and doubt

3. RECITATIVO ALTO

Mein Jesu, heißest du des Todes Gift und
 eine Pestilenz der Hölle; ach, daß mich
 noch Gefahr und Schrecken trifft!
 Du legtest selbst auf unsre Zungen
 ein Loblied, welches wir gesungen:

My Jesus, you are called death's poison
 and a pestilence to Hell. Alas, why am I
 still struck by peril and fright?
 You yourself place upon our tongues
 a song of praise, which we sing:

4. CORALE

Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag,
 dran sich niemand gnug freuen mag:
 Christ, unser Herr, heut triumphiert
 all sein Feind er gefangen führt
 Alleluja!

The glorious day has appeared
 in which no one can rejoice enough:
 Christ, our Lord, triumphs today
 all his foes he leads captive.
 Alleluia!

Nicholas Hermann,
 Erschienen ist der
 herrlich Tag, v1
 (1560)

5. RECITATIVO ALTO

Doch scheint fast, daß mich
 der Feinde Rest,
 den ich zu groß und allzu schrecklich finde
 nicht ruhig bleiben läßt
 Doch, wenn du mir den Sieg erworben
 hast, so streite selbst mit mir,
 mit deinem Kinde.
 Ja, ja, wir spüren schon im Glauben daß du,
 o Friedefürst dein Wort und Werk an uns
 erfüllen wirst.

Still, it seems almost as if
 the remnants of the foe—
 which I find far too great and dreadful—
 will not leave me in peace.
 So, though you have won the victory for
 me, you still have to contend with me,
 with your child.
 Yet see: it is only through faith that we
 experience you, O prince of peace, how
 you fulfill your word and deed within us.

1 John 5.4-5 ...this is
 the victory that
 overcomes the
 world: our faith.

Turning point of
 cantata

6. ARIA BASSO E CORO

Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch!

Faithful: Wohl uns!

Jesus hilft uns kämpfen
 und die Wut der Feinde dämpfen.
 Hölle, Satan, weich!

Vox Christi: Peace be with you!

Faithful: Blessed are we!

Jesus helps us fight
 and stifles the raging of our foes.
 Hell and Satan, yield!

Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch

Vox Christi: Peace be with you!

Faithful: Jesus holet uns zum Frieden
 und erquicket in uns Müden
 Geist und Leib zugleich.

Faithful: Jesus delivers us unto peace
 and comforts us, the weary,
 in spirit and body.

Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch

Vox Christi: Peace be with you!

Faithful: O Herr, hilf und lass gelingen,
 durch den Tod hindurchzudringen
 in dein Ehrenreich!

Faithful: O Lord, help us, let us prosper
 and press forward through death
 to your kingdom of glory!

Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch!

Vox Christi: Peace be with you!

John 20.19-21 On the
 evening of that
 day...the doors being
 shut where the
 disciples were...
 Jesus came and stood
 among them and said
 to them, 'Peace be
 with you.'

7. CORALE

Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ,
wahr' Mensch und wahrer Gott
ein starker Nothelfer du bist
im Leben und im Tod:
drum wir allein
im Namen dein
zu deinem Vater schreien

You, prince of peace, Lord Jesus Christ,
true human and true God,
you are a mighty helper in need
in life and in death.
Thus we alone,
in your name,
cry unto the Father.

Jakob Ebert, stanza 1 of
Du Friedefürst, Herr
Jesu Christ (1601)

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BWV 67 *Halt' im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ* was first performed on April 16, 1724.

Theological Narrative

BWV 67 looks at the same biblical event as BWV 6: the appearance of Jesus to the disciples after the resurrection. Luke, the gospel for BWV 6, places the narrative on the road to Emmaus. John, the gospel for BWV 67, has Jesus appearing in the locked upper room where ten of the disciples are gathered. The absent Thomas is disbelieving until he himself sees Jesus and thus has been dubbed Doubting Thomas through the ages. In BWV 6, Bach uses the metaphor of evening falling to explore darkness and light; in BWV 67, he takes story of Thomas' doubt to depict the journey from doubt to faith.

The opening chorus begins with the cornos' long-held note emphasizing the "hold" of the text ("Hold in memory that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead"—2 Timothy 2.8). The note segues into the opening motif of the chorale *O Lamm Gottes Unschuldig*, the German *Agnus Dei*, which embodies the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection.



Bach would have expected his congregation to hear these words each time the motif sounded:

O innocent Lamb of God

and to be reminded of the message that follows those words:

You have borne all sins, otherwise we would have to despair.

In the second movement, Bach introduces the faith/doubt theme through two motifs, one steady, one jittery and off-balance:



faith motif

"My Jesus is risen;

doubt motif

why am I still afraid?"

By using variations of both motifs in the B section as the tenor calls for Jesus to appear, Bach is clearly pointing to how strong doubt might be in the life of the Faithful.

The three center movements may be heard as a whole. The first recitative, a reminder that the church provides the structure to support faith, leads directly into the Easter chorale *Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag* (Brightly shines the glorious day). The second recitative continues the focus on doubt until four bars before the end: at the words, "Yet see: it is only through faith..." Bach quietly transforms a c# minor chord into C# major and follows with a progression of descending fifths. That subtle change is the exact turning point of the cantata, the point at which doubt is transformed into faith.

Even with faith ascendant, there is much to be learned. In the aria for bass solo and soprano-alto-tenor chorus, Bach presents a dramatic interpretation of Jesus' message—to the disciples and to the Faithful. *Fried emit euch* ("peace be with you"), a translation of *shalom aleichem*, encompasses a number of meanings in both the Old and New Testaments. In addition to being a commonplace term of greeting and farewell, *shalom* implies quietude and rest, a sense of wholeness and well-being, and a transcendence through grace into the peace of the Holy Spirit. I think that Bach incorporates all these interpretations by alternating sections that feature, on the one hand, a bass solo—the *vox Christi*—singing this phrase with sections that feature SAT choruses—the Faithful—responding to it. The aria opens with the strings playing the music of the Faithful: vigorous (even tumultuous) 16th note phrases in 4/4 meter. This fades into the music associated with Jesus—a halo of woodwinds playing parallel thirds and sixths in triplets and in 3/4 meter. Jesus sings his line. Fade back into the string music where the Faithful interpret the phrase as peace after a victorious battle. In the same kind of fade-in/fade-out (John Elliot Gardiner likens this technique to a movie dissolve), Jesus appears a second time. The Faithful read that peace as the refreshing of their spirits; after the third appearance of Jesus, they finally understand "peace" as true well being through grace. The aria ends with the Jesus music but with the violins joining the woodwinds and bass for the final "Peace be with you," a farewell.

Tonality and Structure

Bach structures this cantata in a way that emphasizes both the solid framework the church provides for the Faithful and the journey from doubt to faith itself.

The opening chorus is a rondo. The opening ritornello, a sinfonia, returns in the middle and at the end to accompany the free polyphony of the chorus. The tonality moves from 3 #s to 5 and back to 3.

	Ritornello	Prelude & fugue	Ritornello	Prelude & Fugue	Ritornello
	Orchestra alone	Orchestra Chorus	Orchestra Chorus	Orchestra Chorus	Orchestra Chorus
Implicit keys	A (3 #s)	A—>B (5 #s)	E (4 #s)	E—>B (5 #s)	A (3 #s)

In the middle three movements—recitative–chorale–recitative—Bach explores the farther reaches of sharp keys before returning to the home key of A. In the well-tempered tuning of the day, notes like b# and f* (f double-#) would not be equivalents of c and g as in our equal-tempered tuning; they would, in fact, sound pretty harsh. I think that Bach may well have meant that harshness as a metaphor for the difficulty of the journey.

	Recitative	Chorale	Recitative
Implicit keys	c#—F# (4 #s—>6 #s)	F# (6 #s)	G#—A (7 #s—>3 #s)

The second aria, like the opening movement, is a rondo, albeit an extended one. A and B sections are distinguished by meter (4/4 vs 3/4) and orchestration (strings with SAT vs woodwinds with B). There is little movement away from the home key of A and its relative minor f#—Bach perhaps intended this to emphasize the steady message of Christ to the Faithful. The aria ends with the B section instead of the A, a wrinkle on the rondo form that I suspect Bach used to point to the journey from doubt to faith bringing the Faithful to a new level of understanding.

Orchestration	Strings alone	Woodwinds & vox Christi	Strings & Faithful	Woodwinds & vox Christi	Strings & Faithful	Woodwinds & vox Christi	Strings, vox Christi & Faithful	Woodwinds, strings & vox Christi
Text		Peace	Victory after battle	Peace	Refreshing the spirit	Peace	Peace/wholeness	Peace
Meter	4/4	3/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	3/4
Implicit keys	A (3#s)	A	A	A	f# (3#s)	D (2 #s)	f# (3 #s)	A (3#s)

Taken as a whole, the structure of the cantata forms a remarkable symmetry. The opening chorus and first aria balance the second aria and closing choral; they stand as pillars on either side of the middle three movements where faith overtakes doubt.

	Chorus	Aria	Recit	Chorale	Recit	Aria	Chorale
Key signatures	A	E	c#	F#	G#	A	A

Gospel for the Day

John 20:19-31 (21st Century King James Version)

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in their midst and said unto them, "Peace be unto you."

20 And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, "Peace be unto you. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said unto them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost.

23 Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said unto them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

26 And after eight days the disciples were again within, and Thomas was with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be unto you."

27 Then said He to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger and behold My hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing."

28 And Thomas answered and said unto Him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said unto him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.

31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through His name.