

Original German Text

I. Sinfonia

II. Chorus

Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich.
Mein Gott, ich hoffe auf dich.
Laß mich nicht zuschanden werden,
dass sich meine Feinde nicht freuen über mich.

III. Aria (Soprano)

Doch bin und bleibe ich vergnügt,
Obgleich hier zeitlich toben
Kreuz, Sturm und andre Proben,
Tod, Höll und was sich fügt.
Ob Unfall schlägt den treuen Knecht,
Recht ist und bleibet ewig Recht.

IV. Chorus

Leite mich in deiner Wahrheit und lehre mich;
denn du bist der Gott, der mir hilft,
täglich harre ich dein.

V. Trio (Alto, Tenor, Bass)

Zedern müssen von den Winden
Oft viel Ungemach empfinden,
Oftmals werden sie verkehrt.
Rat und Tat auf Gott gestellet,
Achtet nicht, was widerbellet,
Denn sein Wort ganz anders lehrt.

VI. Chorus

Meine Augen sehen stets zu dem Herrn;
denn er wird meinen Fuß aus dem Netze ziehen.

VII. Chorus

Meine Tage in dem Leide
Endet Gott dennoch zur Freude;
Christen auf den Dornenwegen
Führen Himmels Kraft und Segen.
Bleibet Gott mein treuer Schutz,
Achte ich nicht Menschentutz,
Christus, der uns steht zur Seiten,
Hilft mir täglich sieghaft streiten.

continued

English Translation

I. Sinfonia

II. Chorus

For you, Lord, is my longing.
My G*d, I hope in you.
Let me not be put to shame,
so that my enemies may not rejoice over me.

III. Aria (Soprano)

But I am and remain content,
although here for a time there rage
cross, storm and other trials,
death, hell and what is ordained.
Even if misfortune strikes your faithful servant,
right is and always remains right.

IV. Chorus

Lead me in your truth and teach me:
for you are the G*d, who helps me,
everyday I wait on you.

V. Trio (Alto, Tenor, Bass)

Cedars must before the wind
often feel much hardship,
often they are overturned.
Thought and action entrust to G*d,
pay no attention to what howls against you,
for his word teaches quite otherwise.

VI. Chorus

My eyes look always towards the Lord
for he will pull my foot out of the net.

VII. Chorus

My days spent in sorrow
G*d ends nevertheless with joy;
Christians on the thorny ways
are led by heaven's strength and blessing.
If G*d remains my faithful protection,
I do not care for men's spite.
Christ, who stands at our side,
helps me everyday to strive victoriously.



** Out of respect for Arlington Street Church members and friends who are Jewish,
we follow the tradition of not spelling out G*d's name.*

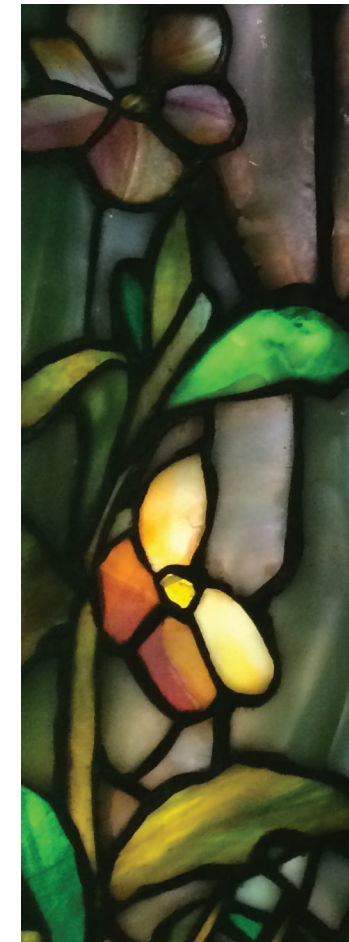


ARLINGTON
STREET CHURCH
Unitarian Universalist

**CANTATA 150 ~ NACH DIR, HERR,
VERLANGET MICH**

BY JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

**TEXTS, TRANSLATIONS,
AND PROGRAM NOTES**



Arlington Street Church
Boston, Massachusetts
Founded in 1729

Gathered in love and service for justice and peace

CANTATA 150 ~ NACH DIR, HERR, VERLANGET MICH

BY JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Mark David Buckles, conductor

Hannah Shanefield, soprano
Bek Zehr, mezzo soprano
Daniel Rosensweig, tenor
Andrew Stack, baritone

Karen Burciaga, violin
Julie Metcalf, violin
Ariel Friedman, violoncello
Sam Childers, bassoon
Cheng Cheng, organ

&

The Arlington Street Church Choir

PROGRAM NOTES

What does one make of a holiday such as Easter these days, over two years into a global pandemic, with war and suffering in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Yemen, Afghanistan, and so many places throughout the world? Life is complex, and simple answers are unsatisfying. Yet in a time filled with hardships, we are called to acknowledge the possibility of beauty, rebirth, consolation, and hope.

All of these feelings led me back to one of my favorite Bach cantatas, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*, BWV 150. In the text and the music, our trajectory is joy, but our pathway is laden with longing, struggle, and oftentimes pain.

As our choir has just recently begun to sing together again, it has been heart-opening to work on this piece together, to hear one another's voices singing in the same room, and to have the opportunity to lean into the complexity of our complicated feelings through experiencing truly great art. I hope this piece touches you the same way today. Its theology is specifically Christian; please follow along with the translation and/or the musical descriptions if they speak to you. If not, I invite you to sit back and simply breathe in the sounds of the voices, the instruments, and the poetry, speaking to us from across the centuries.



Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich, BWV 150 is one of Bach's earliest surviving cantatas. Although the exact date of composition and occasion for which it was written are unknown, it was most likely composed between 1708 and 1710 and first performed in Mülhausen, Germany.

Cantata 150 is unique among Bach's cantatas in its sparse orchestration (two violins, bassoon, and basso continuo – played here by portative organ and violoncello) and in the independence and prominence of the chorus, which is featured in four out of seven movements. It shares several elements with other early cantatas, including 131, 71, and 106. The form is that of alternating choruses and arias; there are no recitatives, no da capo repeats, and perhaps most notably, no chorale tune. Bach makes extensive use of choral fugues and imitative polyphony, and often shifts the tempo and character of the music within movements very quickly to accommodate a new musical idea with each successive phrase of text. This occurs most distinctly in the second and fourth movements.

The libretto alternates between Biblical verses and free poetry (a rarity among Bach's early cantatas). The Biblical verses are all taken from Psalm 25; the author of the poetry is unknown. Both depict themes of longing and trust. Many of Bach's religious cantatas begin on themes such as despair, grief, or guilt; and end on notes of joy, consolation, or hope. Bach's setting of this libretto amplifies this effect, suggesting a thematic tension between longing and faith within every movement.

The *sinfonia* and the opening choral movement are both based on the motive of an octave leap followed by five descending half steps. This chromatic figure, sometimes dubbed the "lamento bass," has been utilized by composers as early as Monteverdi as a musical representation of anguish, pain, and longing. This mournful state is interrupted with breathless faster tempos intimating a pleading sense of urgency. The concluding choral fugue of the second movement makes the embittered wish that "my enemies not rejoice over me."

Movement three is a brief soprano aria displaying both *toben* (rages) and *vergnünt* (contentment). Several vivid images are present: death and hell are pictorialized by a falling diminished seventh, and the violins, who are in unison, grind repeated aggressive double-stops at the text "cross, storm."

The sublimity of the opening and closing verses affirm perpetual contentment, despite the trials of worldly life.

The fourth movement, *Leite mich* ("Lead me") begins with a plea for guidance and ends with a pledge of fidelity: "Daily, I await thee." In the opening, Bach weaves a long, continuously ascending scale up from the basses' low B-natural, through each voice part, and finally into the violins, spanning more than three octaves – both a pun on the German words for "scale" (*leiter*) and "to lead" (*leiten*) and an arresting musical gesture.

One of only a handful of vocal trios to be found in Bach's oeuvre, movement five is also the only movement in the cantata in the major mode, shifting from B minor to D major. Tumultuous and unrelenting 16th notes in the cello paint the image of cedars being tossed by the winds. Over this noise, the alto, tenor, and bass soloists gently sustain, adding a bit of momentary agitation only at the phrase "heed not what clamors" and ending simply on a beatific unison.

During the opening of movement six, "My eyes gaze continually at the Lord," the violins have a beautiful duet, crossing and recrossing, surrounding the singers sonically on either side. The music shifts to an allegro fugue at the words "for he will pull my foot out of the net." The entanglement is portrayed through the cross-rhythms caused by a hemiola in the fugue subject, as well as the tangled chromaticism in the tenor and bass voices at the close of the movement that underlie an exquisite chain of suspensions in the alto and soprano voices.

The final movement is a *chaconne*, built on a ground bass that progresses through a series of modulations. The first line of verse sums up the theme of the piece: "My days in suffering, G*d will nevertheless end in joy." The blocks of vocal harmony at the first entrance give way to wavering 6ths between the sopranos and altos on the word "joy." Several short solos and a tempestuous instrumental interlude follow before the final choral statements.

Some have called the ending of this cantata triumphant and majestic, but there is pain in this music, too. The struggle between suffering and joy is cast as a battle, fought daily. The conclusion of Cantata 150 is filled with longing, but ultimately, and simultaneously, with trust and hope.

~Mark David Buckles

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