



55th Year

2025–2026

BACH

Cantata Vespers



**Grace Lutheran Church
River Forest, Illinois**

**Sunday afternoons
Lecture at 3:00 p.m.
Prelude at 3:45 p.m.**

February 22, 2026

Tue Rechnung! Donnerwort
Settle the account! Word of thunder

Welcome to Grace Lutheran Church

We are glad that you have joined us for this afternoon's Bach Cantata Vespers.

Today's service is also available on the [Bach Cantata Vespers YouTube Channel](#).

For those who have trouble hearing, sound enhancement units are available in the back of the church and may be obtained from an usher.

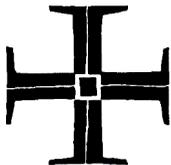
Please silence all cell phones and pagers.

Recording or photography of any kind during the service is strictly forbidden.

We ask that you kindly refrain from applause during this service of worship.

The First Sunday in Lent
February 22, 2026

EVENING PRAYER



Background notes on the prelude are on page 23.

PRELUDE

Symphony No. 3, Op. 28

Louis Vierne
(1870–1937)

IV. Adagio

Wondrous Love: Variations on a Shape-Note Hymn, Op. 34

Samuel Barber
(1910–1981)

Fugue in G minor, BWV 542b

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Timothy Spelbring, organist

We stand, facing the candle as we sing.

SERVICE OF LIGHT



Behold, now is the accept - ab - le time; now is the day of sal - va - tion.



Turn us again,
O God of our sal - va - tion, that the light
of your face may shine on us.



May your justice shine like the sun; and may the poor be lifted up.



☐ Joy-ous light of glo - ry: ☑ of the im - mor - tal Fa - ther;



heav - en - ly, ho - ly, bless - ed Je - sus Christ.



We have come to the set-ting of the sun, and we look to the eve-ning light.



We sing to God, the Fa-ther, Son, and Ho-ly Spir - it: You are wor-thy of



be - ing praised with pure voic - es for - ev - er. O Son of God,



O Giv - er of life: The u - ni - verse pro - claims your glo - ry.



☐ The Lord be with you. ☑ And al - so with you.



☐ Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. ☑ It is right to give him thanks and praise.



☐ Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led your people



Israel by a pil - lar of cloud by day and a pil - lar of fire by night:



Enlighten our darkness by the light of your Christ; may his Word be a lamp



to our feet and a light to our path; for you are mer - ci - ful,



and you love your whole cre - a - tion, and we, your crea - tures, glo - ri - fy you,



Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Spir - it. **☩ A - men**

✠ PSALMODY ✠

We sit.

PSALM 141

Women sing parts marked ❶. Men sing parts marked ❷. All sing parts marked ❸.



❸ Let my prayer rise be - fore you as in - cense;



the lift - ing up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice.



❶ O Lord, I call to you; come to me quick - ly; hear my voice when I cry to you.



❷ Let my prayer rise be - fore you as in - cense;



the lift - ing up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice.

I Set a watch be-fore my mouth, O Lord, and guard the door of my lips.

II Let not my heart in-cline to an - y e - vil thing; let me not be oc - cu -

pied in wick - ed - ness with e - vil - do - ers. **I** But my eyes are

turned to you, Lord God; in you I take ref - uge. Strip me not of my life.

II Glo - ry to the Fa - ther, and to the Son, and to the Ho - ly Spir - it;

I as it was in the be - gin - ning, is now, and will be for - ev - er. A - men.

C Let my prayer rise be - fore you as in - cense;

the lift - ing up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice.

Silence for meditation is observed, then:

PSALM PRAYER

L Let the incense of our repentant prayer ascend before you, O Lord, and let your lovingkindness descend upon us, that with purified minds we may sing your praises with the Church on earth and the whole heavenly host, and may glorify you forever and ever.

C Amen.

Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort,
Uphold us, Lord, by your Word,
Und steure deiner Feinde Mord,
And direct the murderous rage of your enemies,
Die Jesum Christum, deinen Sohn,
Who, Jesus Christ, your Son,
Stürzen wollen von seinem Thron.
They want to overthrow from his throne.

Beweis dein Macht, Herr Jesu Christ,
Show forth your might, Lord Jesus Christ,
Der du Herr aller Herren bist;
You who are the Lord of Lords;
Beschirm dein arme Christenheit,
Protect your poor Christendom,
Dass sie dich lob in Ewigkeit.
So that they may praise you forever.

Gott Heilger Geist, du Tröster wert,
God, Holy Spirit, you precious comforter,
Gib dein'm Volk einerlei Sinn auf Erd,
Give to your people one common mind on earth,
Steh bei uns in der letzten Not!
Stand by us in our time of need,
G'leit uns ins Leben aus dem Tod!
Lead us out of death to life!

Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich,
Grant us peace, mercifully,
Herr Gott, zu unsern Zeiten;
Lord God, in our time;
Es ist doch ja kein anderer nicht,
There is indeed none other
Der für uns könnte streiten,
Who could fight for us
Denn du, unser Gott, alleine.
Except you, our God, alone.

Continued on the following page.

Gib unsern Fürst'n und aller Obrigkeit
Grant to our princes and all authority
Fried und gut Regiment,
Peace and good government
Dass wir unter ihnen
So that we, under them,
Ein geruh'g und stilles Leben führen mögen
May lead a calm and quiet life,
In aller Gottseligkeit und Ehrbarkeit. Amen.
In all godliness and honesty. Amen.

Martin Luther, tr. Karen P. Danford

Silence for meditation is observed, then:

COLLECT

- ☒ Lord God, our strength,
the battle of good and evil rages within and around us,
and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises.
Keep us steadfast in your Word and, when we fall,
raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- ☒ **Amen.**

The offering is gathered.

OFFERING/VOLUNTARY

Sonata No. 3 in D minor

Johann Sebastian Bach

I. Andante

*The offering assists in defraying costs of the Bach Cantata Vespers ministry.
Please make checks payable to Grace Lutheran Church with "Bach Cantata Vespers" in the memo.
You may also contribute online at www.bachvespers.org.
Your generosity is appreciated.*

We stand.

HYMN: O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth

Stanza 2 Setting by Jan Bender
Organ Introduction by Paul D. Weber



1. O God, O Lord of heav'n and earth, Thy liv - ing fin - ger
Choir 2. Our fa - tal will to e - qual thee, Our re - bel will wrought
3. Thou cam - est to our hall of death, O Christ, to breathe our
4. O Spir - it, who did once re - store Thy church that it might



nev - er wrote That life should be an aim - less mote, A death - ward
death and night. We seized and used in thy de - spite thy won - drous
poi - soned air, To drink for us the dark des - pair That stran - gles
yet re - call The bring - er of good news to all: Breathe on thy



drift from fu - tile birth. Thy word meant life tri - um - phant
gift of lib - er - ty. We housed us in this house of
our re - luc - tant breath. How beau - ti - ful the feet that
clo - ven church once more, That in these gray and lat - ter



hurled Thru ev' - ry cran - ny of thy world. Since light a - woke and
doom, Where death had roy - al scope and room, Un - til thy Ser - vant,
trod The road that leads us back to God. How beau - ti - ful the
days There may be those whose life is praise, Each life a high dox -



light be - gan Thou mad'st for us a ho - ly plan.
Prince of Peace, Breached all its walls for our re - lease.
feet that bring Good tid - ings of our sav - ing King!
ol - o - gy To Fa - ther, Son, and un - to Thee.

Text: Martin H. Franzmann, 1907–1976, alt.
Music: WITTENBERG NEW, Jan O. Bender, 1909–1994

Text and tune © 1967 Lutheran Council in the USA, admin. Augsburg Fortress

✠ WORD ✠

We sit.

READING: 1 Corinthians 10:6–13

[St. Paul writes:] ⁶Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.” ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

L The Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

READING: Luke 16:1–9

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ²So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ ³Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ ⁵So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ ⁷Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’ ⁸And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.”

L The Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

HOMILY

The Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Palmer

CANTATA: *Tue Rechnung! Donnerwort*, BWV 168

Johann Sebastian Bach

*Translation of the German text and notes corresponding to each movement are below.
Background notes for the cantata are found on pages 24 and 25 in this worship folder.*

1. Aria (Bass)

Tue Rechnung! Donnerwort,
Settle your account! Word of thunder
Das die Felsen selbst zerspaltet,
That itself splits apart the rocks,
Wort, wovon mein Blut erkaltet!
Word, at which my blood turns cold!
Tue Rechnung! Seele, fort!
Settle your account! My soul, onward!
Ach, du mußt Gott wiedergeben
Ah, you must give back to God
Seine Güter, Leib und Leben.
His goods, body and life,
Tue Rechnung! Donnerwort!
Settle your account! Word of thunder!

Relentless sixteenth-note triplets in the continuo, dotted rhythms in the strings and lively coloratura for the vocalist depict the urgent, driving command to “Settle your account!” The accompaniment moves onward even when the singer sustains a long low note at “my blood turns cold.” The middle section, more reflective, is accompanied only by continuo, before the violins and violas return for an abbreviated repeat of the “Word of thunder” music from the beginning.

2. Recitative (Tenor)

Es ist nur fremdes Gut,

It is only foreign property,

Was ich in diesem Leben habe;

What I have in this life;

Geist, Leben, Mut und Blut

Spirit, life, courage and blood

Und Amt und Stand ist meines Gottes Gabe,

And office and rank are my God's gifts.

Es ist mir zum Verwalten

It is for me to manage

Und treulich damit hauszuhalten

And faithfully to take care of

Von hohen Händen anvertraut.

What is entrusted to me by hands from above.

Ach! aber ach! mir graut,

Ah, but alas! I am horrified

Wenn ich in mein Gewissen gehe

When I look into my conscience

Und meine Rechnungen so voll Defekte sehe!

And see my accounts so full of defects!

Ich habe Tag und Nacht

I have, day and night,

Die Güter, die mir Gott verliehen,

The things that God has lent to me

Kaltsinnig durchgebracht!

Pushed through coldheartedly.

Wie kann ich dir, gerechter Gott, entfliehen?

How can I, righteous God, flee from you?

Ich rufe flehentlich:

I call out entreatingly:

Ihr Berge fallt! ihr Hügel decket mich

You mountains, fall! You hills, cover me

Vor Gottes Zorngerichte

Before God's angry judgements

Und vor dem Blitz von seinem Angesichte!

And before the lightning of his countenance!

Accompanied by sustained notes in the oboes d'amore, the singer recognizes and confesses the defects in his stewardship of God's gifts. When he calls for mountains to fall and hide him from God's judgment, the oboes play quick, descending arpeggios illustrating the falling rocks. The lightning of God's countenance is also illustrated in the oboes.

3. Aria (Tenor)

Kapital und Interessen,

Capital and interest,

Meine Schulden groß und klein

My debts great and small

Müssen einst verrechnet sein.

Must be settled at some point.

Alles, was ich schuldig blieben,

Everything for which I remain indebted

Ist in Gottes Buch geschrieben

Is written in God's book

Als mit Stahl und Demantstein.

As with steel and diamonds.

The financial metaphors continue, resulting in an unlikely Bach aria about debt, capital and interest. The oboes play in unison above the continuo. Longer notes in the vocal line on the words diamond and steel show that debts to God have substance and are not easily forgiven.

4. Recitative (Bass)

Jedoch, erschrocknes Herz, leb und verzage nicht!

However, my frightened heart, live and do not despair!

Tritt freudig vor Gericht!

Step joyfully before the court!

Und überführt dich dein Gewissen,

And if your conscience convicts you

Du werdest hier verstummen müssen,

You will have to stay silent here,

So schau den Bürgen an,

Then look to your guarantor

Der alle Schulden abgetan!

Who takes away all debts!

Es ist bezahlt und völlig abgeführt,

It is paid and fully discharged,

Was du, o Mensch, in Rechnung schuldig blieben;

What for you, O man, remains owing in your account;

Des Lammes Blut, o großes Lieben!

Blood of the Lamb, O great love!

Hat deine Schuld durchstrichen

Has crossed out your debt

Und dich mit Gott verglichen.

And compared you with God.

Es ist bezahlt, du bist quittiert!

It is paid, you are cleared!

Indessen,

Meanwhile,

Weil du weißt,

Because you know

Daß du Haushalter seist,

That you are a steward,

So sei bemüht und unvergessen,

So be diligent and do not forget,

Den Mammon klüglich anzuwenden,

To use mammon cleverly,

Den Armen wohlzutun,

To do good to the poor,

So wirst du, wenn sich Zeit und Leben enden,

So you will, when time and life come to an end,

In Himmelshütten sicher ruhn.

Rest safely in heaven's shelters.

A secco recitative – straightforward “dry” text – announces that the sinner’s debts to God have been paid by the blood of Christ and exhorts listeners to practice good stewardship. That includes, as suggested by Jesus at the end of parable, using the wealth of the world wisely to do good to the poor.

5. Duet (soprano, alto)

Herz, zerrei des Mammons Kette,

Heart, tear apart mammon’s chains,

Hnde, streuet Gutes aus!

Hands, scatter your good things!

Machet sanft mein Sterbebette,

Make my deathbed soft,

Bauet mir ein festes Haus,

Build for me a solid house

Das im Himmel ewig bleibet,

That remains forever in heaven

Wenn der Erde Gut zerstubet.

When earth’s goods turn to dust.

The duet for alto and soprano looks ahead to the end of earthly possessions and a safe, eternal home in heaven. The musical motifs in the continuo reinforce the tearing apart images in the text. Each vocal section begins with imitative entrances as the melodies illustrate the chains of mammon, the descent into death, rising into heaven, and at the final cadence, the scattering of earthly goods into dust (*zerstubet*).

6. Chorale

Stärk mich mit deinem Freudengeist,

Strengthen me with your joyful spirit,

Heil mich mit deinen Wunden,

Heal me with your wounds,

Wasch mich mit deinem Todesschweiß

Wash me with the sweat of your death

In meiner letzten Stunden;

In my final hours;

Und nimm mich einst, wenn dirs gefällt,

And take me one day, whenever it pleases you,

In wahrem Glauben von der Welt

In true faith from this world

Zu deinen Auserwählten.

To be with your chosen ones.

Librettist Salomo Franck chose stanza 4 of Bartholomäus Ringwaldt's eight-stanza 1588 penitential chorale "*Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut*" (Lord Jesus Christ, thou highest good), to end the cantata and direct listeners' attention from this world to the next.



Silence is observed, then:

☐ In many and various ways God spoke to his people of old by the prophets.

☑ But now in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

We stand.

MAGNIFICAT



☑ My soul pro-claims the great-ness of the Lord; my spir- it re-joic- es in



God my Sav-ior, for he has looked with fa-vor on his low-ly ser- vant.



From this day all gen-er - a - tions will call me bless - ed.



The Al-might-y has done great things for me, and ho-ly is his name.



He has mer-cy on those who fear him in ev - 'ry gen- er - a - tion.



He has shown the strength of his arm; he has scat - tered the



proud in their con- ceit. He has cast down the might- y from their thrones,



and has lift - ed up the low - ly. He has filled the

hun-gry with good things, and the rich he has sent a - way emp - ty.

He has come to the help of his ser - vant Is - ra - el,

for he has re - mem - bered his prom - ise of mer - cy, the prom - ise he

made to our fa - thers, to A - bra - ham and his chil - dren for - ev - er.

Glo - ry to the Fa - ther, and to the Son, and to the Ho - ly Spir - it;

as it was in the be - gin - ning, is now, and will be for - ev - er. A - men



† PRAYERS †

LITANY



L In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **C** Lord, have mer - cy.

After each petition:

L ...let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.

The litany concludes:

L Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Silence is kept, then:

L Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our Lord.



C To you, O Lord.

L O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments; and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God forever.

C Amen.

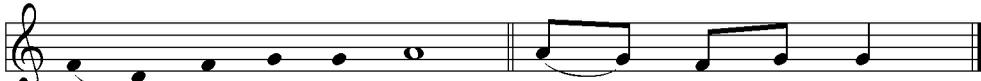
L Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

C **Our Father, who art in heaven,**
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

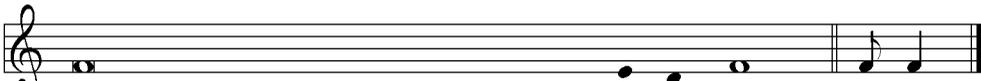
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICAMUS DOMINO & BENEDICTION



L Let us bless the Lord. **C** Thanks be to God.



P The almighty and merciful Lord,
the Father, ✠ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and pre-serve you. **C** A - men



HYMN: For Faith, We Praise You, Lord

Tune and Concertato by Kevin Hildebrand

(b. 1973)



C 1. For faith we praise You, Lord, From Spir - it - o - pened hearts, Pierced

Choir 2. From in - fan - cy we've known And firm - ly have be - lieved; Your

C 3. One soul needs sol - id food, An - oth - er; milk is fed; You

Choir 4. For mas - ter work - ers' zest, Who la - bored by Your grace And

C 5. For us, O Christ, we praise, That we with clar - i - ty, May



by your two - edged sword And all its truth im - parts— All
Word of faith was sown, When we Your Name re - ceived— Your
feed, yet none ex - clude, O Christ, true liv - ing Bread— As
craft - ed what was best To send forth from this place— For
al - so in our day Hold fast Your ver - i - ty— Look



Scrip - ture is breathed out by You, Is meant for all and
po - tent, liv - ing Word, all - pure, The Word that ev - er
man - na, You from heav - en came; You placed Your - self be -
them our grate - ful thanks we raise, For all ac - com - plished
on our world with mer - cy still; Pour out Your grace, Your



not for few, Is trea - sure old, yet ev - er new.
will en - dure As light to make our path - ways sure.
-neath our blame, To bear our cross, our guilt, our shame.
in their days, All done, O Lord, for Your sole praise.
peace, good - will, And with Your zeal, O Lord, us fill!

Text: Stephen P. Starke

Tune: VERITY, Kevin Hildebrand

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DISMISSAL

L Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C Thanks be to God!

Leading Worship Today

The Rev. David R. Lyle, leader

The Rev. Elizabeth Palmer, homilist

Grace Parish Choir

The Rev. Michael D. Costello, cantor

Timothy Spelbring, organist

Susan Nelson, soprano

Sarah Ponder, mezzo soprano

Ryan Townsend Strand, tenor

Daniel Eifert, bass

Susan Weber, Lois Harb,

Mike Gillespie, ushers

Bill Rohlfing, audio engineer

Al Swanson, Liz Hanson

livestream audio/video

Orchestra

Christine Janzow Phillips, oboe/oboe d'amore

Meg Busse, oboe/oboe d'amore

Dianne Ryan, bassoon

Betty Lewis, Paul Zafer,

Caroline Slack, Lou Torick, violin I

Francois Henkins, Becky Coffman,

Kjersti Nostbakken, violin II

Naomi Hildner, Ben Weber, viola

Jean Hatmaker, cello

Douglas Johnson, double bass

Timothy Spelbring, continuo organ

Michael D. Costello, harpsichord

Grace Parish Choir

Soprano

Ann Anderson

Katrina Beck

Judy Berghaus

Janel Dennen

Gwen Gotsch

Linda Grisham

Kate Hogenson

Katrina Jurica

Susan Nelson

Ellen Pullin

Ngairé Whiteside-Bull

Alto

Karen Brunssen

Leanne Cribbs

Eunice Eifert

Catherine Hegarty

Cynthia Hill

Johanna Johnson

Gaye Klopach

Jennifer Luebbe

Marilyn Moehlenkamp

Sarah Ponder

Karen Rohde

Irmgard Swanson

Liz Thompson

Tenor

Paul Aanonsen

John Beed

Colin Krueger

Ryan Townsend Strand

Blaine Willhoft

Bass

Douglas Anderson

John Bouman

Mark Bouman

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Background notes on the cantata by Gwen Gotsch. Used by permission.

Notes on the organ music by Timothy Spelbring. Used by permission.

BACKGROUND OF TODAY'S ORGAN MUSIC

The organ music today is intended as a reflection upon the First Sunday in Lent. Each piece demonstrates the reflection we may experience during the Lenten season and gives us a hint of the promise of the resurrection.

For the Prelude, the first work by the French composer Louis Vierne is one of the more famous “slow” movements from his Organ Symphonies. It is reflective in nature and points to the light of Christ we experience throughout this season. The work by American composer Samuel Barber, based on *Wondrous Love*, is a set of variations on this well-known shape-note tune. After a statement of the theme, the work progresses with several variations. These include treatments of the tune in an imitative fashion, an almost toccata-like variation, a lyrical movement, and a chromatic and harmonically daring movement that concludes the set. This work is a response to the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross. The Fugue in G minor by Bach is often paired with a Fantasia movement, though today only the fugue is played. It is a daring display of contrapuntal ingenuity for Bach with minor and major key centers explored. Thus, there is a hint at resurrection promise here.

The Voluntary, or offering music, is a movement from a trio sonata by Bach. Once again, Bach wends his way through various tonalities. In this case, the format is clearly ABA with the recapitulation a repeat of the A section. In each of these works, it is the hope that the listener reflects on the sacrificial love and promise of what lies at the end of our Lenten journey, an empty tomb and a joyous resurrection.

Timothy Spelbring

BACKGROUND OF THE CANTATA

“*Die Rechnung, bitte*” is what you say in German when the meal is finished and it’s time to pay the bill – in other words, “Check, please.” “*Tue Rechnung!*” the opening exclamation of BWV 168, is another thing entirely. The libretto calls it a *Donnerwort*, a “thunder word” that splits rocks and makes the blood run cold.

The phrase “*Tue Rechnung*” comes from Luke 16:1–9, the Parable of the Unjust Steward (or manager, in today’s translation.) It was the gospel lesson for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity, July 29, 1725, when this afternoon’s cantata was first performed. The NRSV Bible translates the phrase with less drama and less-explosive sounds as “Give me an accounting,” the words of the rich man addressing the steward who is about to be fired for squandering the master’s property. The steward, looking out for his own interests, goes out and makes new friends by reducing the debts owed by others to his boss. And then the rich man commends him for his shrewdness. “Any commentator will tell you that this is a difficult text,” writes theologian Lois Malcolm at the Working Preacher website.

Salomo Franck (1659–1725), wrote the libretto for *Tue Rechnung! Donnerwort*, BWV 168. He was a lawyer and poet working at the court of Weimar during the time Bach was employed there as organist and director of music (1708–17). In Franck’s interpretation of the parable, God is the property owner thunderously demanding an account from quaking sinners. This image appears in multiple sources from the era, for example, in a 1679 hymn stanza by the German preacher Johann Olearius:

Account, says the Lord, for all your gifts,
account, fear God, or you will suddenly be gone.
Account! Always remember
these thunderous words.

The text of BWV 168 was published in Franck’s “*Evangelisches Andachts-Opffer*,” a cycle of cantata texts from 1715. The cantata, however, was newly composed in Leipzig; the score from 1725 is clearly a draft. It could not have been performed in Weimar because the court was in mourning on the Ninth Sunday after Trinity in 1715; there was no special music in church services during that time. Franck died in June or July of 1725; perhaps Bach was drawn to this text as a memorial to his friend and their collaboration.

In his first years in Leipzig Bach worked at a feverish pace to present his own church music, newly composed or revived and revised, nearly every Sunday and festival day for two years. These cantata cycles, begun on the First Sunday after Trinity in 1723 and 1724, make up the first and second of the “five complete annual cycles” listed in the *Obituary* published four years after the composer’s death. *Tue Rechnung* is the first known cantata from Bach’s third cycle, cantatas composed between 1725–27. He was no longer composing new music for every Sunday; this gave him time to work on his largest composition ever, the *St. Matthew Passion*, performed on Good Friday, 1727.

BWV 168 is short, less than 20 minutes long. It has no opening chorus. Bach probably made quick work of its composition while still seizing the opportunities for expressive music inherent in Franck’s dramatic text and imagery. That “*Donnerwort*” inspires an active, tumultuous aria for the bass soloist speaking as God, with music that recalls Jesus’ prophecy about the destruction of the temple in the *St. John Passion*. In the tenor recitative and aria Franck’s baroque poetry extends the biblical metaphor to “settle the account” into the world of finance and bookkeeping, with images that would have been easily understood by the eminent burghers of Leipzig, a city of trade and commerce. And while the actions of the steward in the parable and his employer’s approval may leave readers perplexed, the cantata text reminds the congregation that their account has been paid by the suffering and death of Jesus. It also provides instruction on the proper relationship between Christians and “mammon,” i.e., wealth as a false object of worship and devotion.

The text might sound a bit strange to modern ears. But Bach’s music moves listeners through an emotional—and entertaining—journey from fear and trembling to a peaceful deathbed and ultimately, a home in heaven.

Gwen Gotsch

BIOGRAPHIES



Michael D. Costello, director, has served as Cantor at Grace since 2008 and Artistic Director of Consonance—Chicago Choral Artists since 2014. Prior to moving to Illinois in 2008, Costello served as a church musician at parishes in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and served as a pastor at St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina. Costello graduated with a Bachelor in Sacred Music from Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, North Carolina, and a Master of Divinity from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. An accomplished organist known best for sensitive service playing, Costello has published choral and organ works with several publishers, has sung as a baritone with St. Charles Singers and the Grant Park Music Festival Chorus, and performs regularly as a guest musician with other local ensembles.



Daniel Eifert, bass-baritone, is a former member of the Chicago Symphony Chorus and the Grant Park Music Festival Chorus, where he also made appearances as a soloist. He has been featured with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, the Symphony of Oak Park and River Forest, the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the Apollo Chorus of Chicago, and the San Luis Obispo Master Chorale of California. Daniel enjoyed a collaboration with the Bach Institute of Valparaiso University, where he appeared in performances of Bach’s four major choral works. In October 2017, Daniel joined the VU Chorale with the Leipzig Baroque Orchestra for a celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in Germany. He earned degrees from Valparaiso University and the University of Minnesota. Daniel currently resides in Wisconsin with his wife and three children.



Betty Lewis, principal violinist, is an active violinist and violist in the Chicago area performing with groups as diverse as Broadway in Chicago shows and as an extra with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In the summer, she is on the faculty of the Birch Creek Music Performance Center and is a member of the Peninsula Music Festival, both in Door County, Wisconsin. She is the violin, viola and orchestra teacher at Grace Lutheran School and teaches violin and viola at the Chicago School of Violin Making.



Susan Nelson, soprano, a frequent soloist at Grace, holds degrees from the University of Illinois and the Eastman School of Music. Susan teaches voice at Concordia University and Providence St. Mel School, and is the choir and music director at Grace Lutheran Church in Mount Prospect. She has appeared as a chorister and soloist with Lyric Opera of Chicago, Grant Park Chorus and Music of the Baroque, for which she has also served as teaching artist for the past six years. Other local appearances include performances with Midwest Mozart Festival, Harbor Country Opera, and the Rockford and Elmhurst Choral Unions.



Elizabeth Palmer, homilist, is a senior editor at *The Christian Century* magazine and author of *Faith in a Hidden God* (Fortress). An ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, she served as the Lutheran Campus Pastor at the University of Chicago for eight years and has also worked as a hospital chaplain. She is a 1997 graduate of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, where she majored in chemistry, mathematics, and religion. She also holds a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Elizabeth lives with her family in Skokie, Illinois.



Sarah Ponder, mezzo-soprano, enjoys a busy career as a soloist and versatile ensemble singer, performing with Chicago institutions such as Lyric Opera Chicago, Chicago Symphony Chorus, Chicago a cappella, William Ferris Chorale, and Music of the Baroque in addition to various appearances in the region. A passionate educator and performer, Ponder holds an outreach position with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra where she works with at-risk youth and has also recorded original works with Carnegie Hall's Lullaby Project. She has also performed several solo concerts with famed Maestro Riccardo Muti at the piano, bringing opera to new audiences.



Timothy Spelbring, organist, is Music Director at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Mt. Prospect, Illinois. At St. Mark, he plays the organ and conducts the adult choir and bell choir. He is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the Yale School of Music where he studied with David Boe and Martin Jean respectively. Further studies were at the University of Illinois with Dana Robinson. Spelbring has received numerous awards including the Paul Manz Scholarship, the Selby Houston Prize (awarded at Oberlin), and the E. Stanley Seder Prize (awarded at Yale). He served as concert scholar for the Westfield Center for Early Keyboard studies and performed recitals nationally on their behalf. He currently serves as rehearsal accompanist for the Bach Cantata series at Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest. In addition, he plays for many of the cantata services at Grace. He enjoys playing the trombone and is currently a member of the Northwest Concert Band.



Ryan Townsend Strand, tenor, is a Minnesota native with an expanding career as a concert and oratorio soloist. Strand most recently was a featured soloist performing Handel's *Messiah* with Bella Voce. He also debuted at Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall under the baton of Dame Jane Glover this season with Chicago's Music of the Baroque Chorus. Last November, Strand debuted at Bennett Gordon Hall at Ravinia with his solo recital entitled *Letters To Jackie*, performing 14 works by some of the most sought after voices in classical music today, in tandem with the 61st anniversary of JFK's assassination. Strand has sung with the Grammy award-winning contemporary vocal ensemble The Crossing in Philadelphia under the direction of Donald Nally. Locally, he performs with the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Music of the Baroque, Stare at the Sun, Bella Voce, and the Grant Park Festival Chorus. Mr. Strand is a founding member and executive director of Constellation Men's Ensemble in Chicago.

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Special thanks are extended to Karen P. Danford for her translation of the motet and cantata texts and to Gwen Gotsch for her informative notes on the cantata and careful editing of materials in this worship folder.

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2025–2026

BACH

Cantata Vespers



**Grace Lutheran Church
River Forest, Illinois**

**Sunday afternoons
Lecture at 3:00 p.m.
Prelude at 3:45 p.m.**

February 22

BWV 168

Tue Rechnung! Donnerwort *Settle the account! Word of thunder*

Elizabeth Palmer, *The Christian Century*, Chicago, Illinois, homilist

Timothy Spelbring, St. Mark Lutheran Church, Mount Prospect, Illinois, organist

March 29

BWV 68

Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt *God so loved the world*

M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas), Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, homilist

David Cherwien, Minneapolis, Minnesota, organist

April 19

BWV 146

Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal in das Reich Gottes eingehen

We must enter the kingdom of God through much sorrow

Nathan Klein, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, homilist

Kapelle of Concordia University Chicago, guest choir; **Charles P. Brown**, conductor

Michael D. Costello, Grace Lutheran Church and School, River Forest, Illinois, organist

May 17

BWV 43

Gott fährt auf mit Jauchzen *God goes up with jubilation*

Robert George Moore, St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, Germany, homilist

Gerald Finzi: Violin Concerto; **Eleanor Bartsch**, violinist

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