



**Seeing More Clearly
with the Eyes of Love**

*A Liturgy for Voices based
on Shakespeare's Play, 'A
Midsummer Night's
Dream'*

*A screen stands before the assembly, decorated all over with eyes, petals and leaves. Behind the screen stands a wall.
Music plays beforehand.*

*Those present in the gathered assembly are invited to add their voices where the type is bold under the heading 'ALL'.
At two points they are invited to come forward to share in a symbolic action.*

Coming together in search of love

Voice 1:

Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is from God. (1 John 4:7)

Voice 2:

“Is all our company here?” (MND 1.2.1)

**All: Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God,
for God is love.** (1 John 4:7-8)

Voice 3:

“O hell! To choose love by another’s eyes.” (MND 1.1.140)

Voice 4:

“Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
the flowers appear on the earth,
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,

and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.
O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the cliff..."

**All: "let me see your face,
let me hear your voice" (repeat)**

(Song of Songs 2:10-14)

Voice 5:

"My beloved is mine and I am his;
he pastures his flock among the lilies.
Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle,
or a young stag on the cleft mountains.
Upon my bed at night
I sought him whom my soul loves;
i sought him but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
I will arise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares..."

ALL: "I will seek him whom my soul loves.

I sought him, but found him not

I sought him, but found him not."

(Song of Songs 2:16-3:2)

Music setting phrases:

'Arise, my love, my fair one, come away'

'The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of singing has come'

'let me see your face,
let me hear your voice'
'I sought him whom my soul loves.
I sought him but found him not.'

Failure to see with the eyes of love

Voice 6:

"Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.
.... I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
As she is mine, I may dispose of her." (MND 1.1.22)

Voice 7:

"Prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius!" (MND 1.1.86)

Voice 3:

"I would my father looked but with my eyes."

Voice 7:

"Rather your eyes must with his judgement look.
.... Fit your fancies to your father's will
Or else the law of Athens yields you up." (MND 1.1.56)

Voice 8:

"Love sees not with the eyes but with the mind
And therefore is winged cupid painted blind." (MND 1.2.234)

Voice 1: Jesus said: "I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind".

Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him,
“Surely we are not blind, are we?”

Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have
sin. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains.”

(John 9:39-41)

Voice 7:

“This is hot ice, and wondrous strange snow!

How shall we find the concord of this discord?” (MND 5.1.59)

**All: No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God
lives in us, and God’s love is made perfect in us.**

(1 John 4:12)

Voice 7:

“Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity

In least speak most, to our capacity.” (MND 5.1.104)

Music, setting phrases:

‘Love sees not with the eyes, but with the mind.’

‘Those who do not see may see.’

‘How shall we find the concord of this discord?’

‘No one has ever seen God;

if we love one another, God lives in us.’

Poem: Helena (by Micheal O’Siadhail)

You’re watching Will’s mid-summer lovers’ dream

Where I, Helena, love Demetrius;

You’ll see how I remain the way I seem –

Am I the earthiest of all of us?

Demetrius for Hermia shuns me,

Puck’s juices make Lysander jilt his girl;

Though spurned I am a sign of constancy,

My love stands firm as all the plots unfurl.
I picked my love and loved by will alone,
Desire's no fiction, truth no fantasy;
Demetrius I choose to be my own –
My choice won't change by playing puck with me.
But in the end it's tenderness that tells;
Love won't depend on potions' wake-up spells.

Through Athens I am thought as fair as she,
But Hermia's the soul both men pursue;
Though luckier, more lovable than me,
I'm higher than she is and humbler too.
She'd seen how she could charm and so enthrall
Men's dreams and lives so they both blend and blur
Before Puck's potions would confuse us all,
And saw two sober men could fancy her.
When I in turn start turning heads I think
That both the men and she are mocking me,
Behind my back I wonder if they wink,
Yet don't lose touch with sheer reality.
Awareness of our charms can often pull;
Unwitting beauty proves more beautiful.

Although my love stands firm I must confess
I blench when Hermia's cat rage turns blind;
I have no gift at all in shrewishness,
A foolish heart that I now leave behind.
So spurned, Demetrius's spaniel pup,
Do I demean myself, diminish love?
Though others say that I must harden up,

Do lovers have to be more hawk than dove?
Though anger and love's passion seem akin,
Yet, unlike rage, my love is never blind
But sees how patience in pursuit will win;
Love looks not with eyes but with the mind.
Though spurned in ways that many may despise;
My weakness foolish, yet my love was wise.

***The Song of Mary ('Magnificat') becomes the Song of
Helena***

**ALL: My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the
 lowliness of his handmaiden.
Surely, from now on all generations
 will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things
 for me
and holy is his name.
His mercy is on those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination
 of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their
 thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.**

Music, setting phrases:

'Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind'

'My weakness foolish, yet my love was wise'

'He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.'

'The rich he has sent empty away';

'He has lifted up the lowly'.

Dark forces are released by the failure to see clearly

Voice 9:

"But we are spirits of another sort." (MND 3.2.388)

Poem: Call Me Hobgoblin (by Sinead Morrissey)

You are, Oberon. Robin is not.
Robin's how he's been saying it
off and on for aeons, before you shut
him up: sick to the back teeth
with nectar of fairies' breath,
ankle-bells, lace, moonshowers
of magic dust, incessant *flowers*—
Lord, couldn't you have shown
just a smidgeon more imagination?
While you were making eyes
at wan Titania and practising your sighs,
Puck went AWOL, snapped his girdle
round the shivering world
and pitched up in the churchyard—
out of bounds to you and your lily-livered
sun-sworn entities, but not to him.
And it's amazing, to see the end-in-waiting

for all the poor lost mortals,
up close and personal: their skulls
licked clean of eyes and cheeks and tongues,
their guts a stewing heap of fat and iron.

It's better there than hanging out
on village backroads to make tramps start
or in butter churns for a cheap laugh
at the expense of a stout housewife.
This stuff is *real*. You may not like it,
Sugared King, but every chance he gets
he'll mention it: screech owls, wolves,
bats, shrouds, slid-open graves
and their festering contents, lions
as unlike Snug The Joiner's sweet depiction
as smallpox to a cold—Puck's in
on the actual deal and you're in dreamland.
You know that bit at the end
when he claims he's not lying?
Most of the time—bowing
to you, running your stupid errands, he is.
Listen to when he's not. It's serious.

A moment of silence

Voice 7: “This is hot ice, and wondrous strange snow!

ALL: **How shall we find the concord of this discord?”**

ALL: **Lord, have mercy,**

Voice 1: Christ have mercy,

ALL: **Lord have mercy.**

Music, setting the words:

'Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.'

The same music continues, during the following words:

Voice 1: Listen to the new law of the Christ:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment, And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

Music swells louder, setting the words:

'Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.'

Voice 1:

The Christ says: 'Yours sins are forgiven you. Love one another as I have loved you.' (Luke 7:48; John 15:12)

Petitions and intercessions for the well-being of civic life, as follows or as prepared for the occasion

Voice 2: "Is all our company here?" (MND 1.2.1)

Voice 1:

O Christ, who will pray for those who are not here?

who will pray for a city where relations of love are broken?

Who will cry for those who work out their promises of faithfulness in face of unemployment?

Who will notice those who have lost their homes and friends through legislation they scarcely understand?

Who will pray for councillors, civic managers and politicians who take up the mantle of Theseus and strive to govern justly?

**ALL: “We will see and we will pray:
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.”**

Voice 15: “Why should I then not prosecute my right?”

(MND 1.1.105)

Voice 1: O Christ, who will pray for a city with laws that are unsoftened by love?

Who will see places where dark forces lurk beneath the smooth surface?

Who will notice when powers in high places are tempted to serve only themselves?

Who will pray for those on the edge, at the margins of society, excluded because of their race or gender or poverty?

Who will speak for those who cannot make sense of official forms and fail to claim what is rightfully theirs?

**ALL: “We will see and we will pray:
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.”**

The mysterious gift of seeing with the eyes of love

Voice 10: *The testimony of Paul to the Church at Corinth.*

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling.

My speech and my words were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

"The eye of man has not seen, nor the ear of man heard, nor heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" –

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

(1 Corinthians 2:1-13)

Voice 2: *The testimony of Bottom to his fellow-players:*

"I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was – there is no man can tell what. Methought I was – and methought I had – but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had.

The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, not his heart to report, what my dream was.

I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no bottom."

(MND 4.1.204)

Poem: The Tale of the Weaver's Wife (by Jenny Lewis)

They said I'd married down, to a jackass
weaver who couldn't tell trestles from threads -
me who had always been such an avid
reader – but when he asked, I was two moons
from my fortieth, no time left to dream
of Greek heroes, so we went to the woods

at midsummer and while we were wading
through the heartsease I showed him my assets.
Well! What happened next was more like a dream.
I'd washed my hair in lemon juice and threads
escaping from my cap shone in the moon-
light. He turned me so I couldn't avoid

his mouth and, like a story from Ovid,
I changed from a lass with a somewhat wide
beam to Diana, goddess of the moon –
a retinue of fairies to assist
me, with a crown of flowers and gold threads
like a queen starring in her own drama.

Nine months later, our first born made my dream
complete, but childbearing wasn't over,
and after three more umbilical cords
were cut it was time to announce I would
sleep in our second best bed. A slapped arse
his face was; until he started to moon

over the joiner's girl with the big moon
face, going round as if half in a dream,

prattling of lions, a chink and an ass,
misquoting Saint Augustine to avoid
discussions about our need for new wood
shuttles or patches for the children's thread-

bare clothes. Thinking to catch him, I threaded
my way after him one night at full moon,
and was shocked when he went not to the wood
but the palace. Amateur dramatics!
Barring a slight tendency to over-
act my Nick was the star turn! Or near as.

I'd been an ass to doubt him! False threads our
minds weave (Ovid's moon-struck dream?) So when he
next said "Come to bed, love?" – I said I would.

Music, setting phrases:

'I have had a most rare vision, I have had a dream';
'False threads our minds weave'.
'Eye has not seen, ear has not heard,
nor heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love.'

***The healing of sight through a willingness to be
disturbed***

Voice 9:

"Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound:
And maidens call it 'love in idleness'.
Fetch me that flower...." (MND 2.1.165)

Voice 1: It's true that Oberon's ointment blurs the vision;
his love-juice turns the world quite upside down;
exquisite havoc, bitter-sweet confusion follow on.
But close your eyes one moment, blink and see: already,
all the while, the world has been the wrong way up.

The Christ said: 'I have come that those who see may become blind'.

Others said: 'those who have been turning the world upside down have come here'.
(John 9:39, Acts 17:6)

Voice 9:

"What hast thou done? Thou has mistaken quite
And laid the love-juice on some true love's sight;
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true." (MND 3.2.88)

Voice 11: "Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream."
(MND 4.1.192)

**ALL: "This is hot ice, and wondrous strange snow!
How shall we find the concord of this discord?"**

Voice 1: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:
'I counsel you to obtain from me salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.
Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.'
(Revelation 3:14, 18-20)

The cleansing of eyes

The screen is removed to reveal the wall. Servers stand in front of the wall with bowls of water.

Servers stand in front of the wall with pitchers of water.

As music plays on, those assembled are invited to come forward if they wish, and hold out a cupped hand to receive a little water, with which to wipe their eyes.

Musicians play and sing a setting of verses from Psalm 36, in which those assembled are invited to join if they wish:

God's steadfast love extends to the heavens
and faithfulness to the clouds.

Within the shadow of his wings
all peoples and all creatures hide.

Judgement like a mighty mountain,
righteousness as the deep;
in God all people find mercy and peace.

God's steadfast love extends to the heavens
and faithfulness to the clouds.

Within the fountain of life, light and life we see,
feasting on the abundance of God's house,
drinking from the rivers of his delight.

When all have returned to their seats, the congregation stands to say verses from Psalm 36 responsively, voices alternating between left and right hand side of the building, facing forward, beginning with the left:

**L. Your steadfast love, O Lord,
extends to the heavens
your faithfulness to the clouds.**

R. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgements are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord!

**L. How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your
wings.**

R. They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

**L. For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.**

With clearer eyes, we see that walls of division remain

Voice 5:

“I am my beloved’s,
and his desire is for me.
Come, my beloved,
let us go forth into the fields,
and lodge in the villages;
let us go out early to the vineyards,
and see whether the vines have budded,
whether the grape blossoms have opened
and the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.”

(Song of Songs 7:10-12)

Voice 12 (female):

“But with thy brawls thou has disturbed our sport

the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;
the fold stands empty in the drowned field
and crows are fatted with the murrion flock ...
The human mortals lack their winter cheer:
No night is now with hymn or carol blest
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension." (MND 2.1.87)

**ALL: "This is hot ice, and wondrous strange snow!
How shall we find the concord of this discord?"**

Poem: Titania, later (by Lawrence Sail)

There must have been a wall in my head –
with every idea or affection assigned
to one or the other side of it. I thought
I knew where I was.

There were only two seasons, then – one
of moonlit snow, the other of sand
seared by heat. I watched these weathers
build to a climate:

dreams and history, a taper lit
against the dark, accusing words
against absolving blankness, the garment
of praise against heaviness.

Even in the squint dream within the dream
of the wood at night, I could easily distinguish
the ash from the oak, the key from the cup,
reason from love:

and when the divisions became too long
I could always conjure the boy with the arrows,
or his spitting image, the child with his glittering
wound of need.

I thought I knew where I was, in the shade
of the wind-stirred wood, under the moon
that set the tides seething. I saw too clearly
and misunderstood:

what I thought would be exploration
had been there all along, a known place –
as if I had been holding the right map
the wrong way up.

Only at some dazzling moment of forgiveness,
dreamt or bestowed, could I know acceptance
as a true mystery and, with lips closed,
find the way on:

only then could the wall be unpicked,
brick by rasping brick, until
I recognized where I was – and ahead
the land lay shimmering, single, wide open.

Voice 2:

“Where are these hearts?”

(MND 4.2.25)

The players in the tragedy of ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ come forward.

Voice 13: (*stands in front of the wall*)

“In this same interlude it doth befall
That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;

And such a wall as I would have you think
That had in it a crannied hole, or chink, [*holds up two fingers*]
Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe,
Did whisper often, very secretly.
this loam, this rough-cast, and this stone doth show
That I am that same wall; the truth is so:
And this the cranny is, right and sinister,
Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper.” (MND 5.1.154)

Voice 7:

“Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?”

Voice 11:

“It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse....”

Music plays while a dumb show is briefly performed by those representing Pyramus, Thisbe, lion and ‘moonshine’.

Kept apart by the hostility of their families, and meeting under the light of the moon, Pyramus mistakenly thinks Thisbe has been killed by a lion and stabs himself with his dagger. Thisbe finds his body and in turn kills herself.

Voice 7:

“Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.”

Voice 11:

“Ay, and Wall too.” (MND 5.1.335)

Voice 2: (*‘Pyramus’ jumping to his feet*):

“No, I assure you; the wall is down that parted their fathers.”

The four players repeat three times with increasing volume:

“The wall is down that parted their fathers” (MND 5.1.337)

Breaking down the walls that divide

Appropriate music is played, as the players enter the assembly and encourage people to come forward and help them demolish the wall, each person taking down one 'stone' and laying it to one side.

Voice 10: *A reading from the letter to the Church at Ephesus.*

Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups of people into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.

(Ephesians 2:14-20)

Voice 7:

"I pray you all, stand up.

I know you two are rival enemies:

How comes this gentle concord in the world?"

Voice 14:

"'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of

... all their minds transfigured so together

More witnesseth than fancy's images,

And grows to something of great constancy;
But howsoever, strange and admirable.” (MND 5.1.24)

Voice 9:

“Come, my queen, take hands with me
Now thou and I are new in amity.” (MND 4.1.84)

Voice 5:

“Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.

(Song of Songs 8:6-7)

***Prayers of intercession for the city where walls
separate.*** *Biddings are either written for the occasion or the
following may be used:*

Voice 2: “And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep
little company together nowadays.” (MND 3.1.138)

Voice 1: Who will pray for the city where walls do not protect
but divide?

Who will see the woman suffering violence in her own house?

Who will cry for the parents and children who cannot
understand each other?

Who will speak for the former prisoners who cannot find a
job in a world without trust?

**ALL: “We will see and we will pray:
the wall is down, for love is strong as death.”**

Voice 16: “Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon, we will mend.” (MND 5.1.415)

Voice 1: Who will pray for the city divided against itself?
Who will see the cleaners in wealthy offices, supporting their
children on less than a living wage?
Who will speak for the refugees and the migrant workers,
enduring suspicion and insults every day?
Who will cry for the young people who are alienated from all
figures of authority?
Who will pray for the leaders of ethnic communities, working
for reconciliation across the barriers of race and religion?

**ALL: “We will see and we will pray:
the wall is down, for love is strong as death.”**

Voice 2: “Let me play the lion too!” (MND 1.2.66)

Voice 1:
Who will help each and all to understand their roles?
Who will help them to play their parts with skill, from
greatest to least, from the last to the first?
Who will seek to understand the other and to see the other
with new eyes?
Who will accompany their fellow-players on the way to
concord?

**ALL: “We will see and we will help:
the wall is down, for love is strong as death.”**

Music, setting phrases:

'There must have been a wall in my head';
'I thought I knew where I was';
'I saw too clearly, and misunderstood';
'The wall is down that parted their fathers';
'He has broken down the dividing wall'.

Voice 14: "I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder." (MND 4.1.116)

***The coming of peace to those who will dare to see
clearly with love***

Music again, setting phrases:

'Peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are
near';
'How comes this gentle concord in the world?'
'Love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave'.

Poem: Demetrius to the Audience (by Michael Symmons
Roberts)

Look at me, framed by the safety curtain.
Those offended by full-frontal nakedness
may leave the theatre now, but no returns.

Remember, when the curtain rose,
how I disdained that woman, tried to shake her off,
then caught the fluence and was lost?

Now our play is done, I stand before you,
shrunk and shivering as a half-drowned cat.
To the sceptics I say: does this do

the trick? Do you see me in another light?
Where could I hide a lie in here?
A smuggler of roles, drug mule at an airport?

Will you demand a scan? Cavity search?
You have the naked facts, embodied here by mine.
So stare. But as you stare, consider

that when every trace of fakery is gone,
it's still a desperate mystery to you *and me*,
how this stripped wretch, a man,

is left catastrophised by love against his will.
Helena breaks character, goes home,
waits for her agent to call,

and I'm left gasping like a tide-torn fish.
My every cell in thrall to her. I'm sick.
You think I'm still in role? I wish.

I want to face you without artifice - *defenceless*
I would flay myself in front of you
if it would help me prove my case.

But even flensed would not ring true
for those determined to see guise
where there is none, a feint in skin, an after-show.

I knew that the dismantling of skies,
enchanted forests, glades and mirror pools
would not convince you if the witness of your eyes

said *man-in-costume*, so I broke the spell:
house-lights up and all revealed as painted flats,
racks of lights, seats for sale.

All gone, except this stripped wretch, yes a man,
this sacred flesh, enchanted piece of meat.
Your silence chills me. I must get my clothes on.

***The Song of Simeon ('Nunc Dimittis') becomes the Song
of Demetrius***

**ALL: Lord, now let your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared before the face of all people,
a light to lighten the Gentiles
and to be the glory of your people Israel.**

Voice 16:

"Give me your hands, if we be friends." (MND 5.1.423)

ALL:

**We have listened. We have watched. We have spoken.
What did we hear? What did we see? What did we say?
Past and present. These and those.
Here and now.**

**We reached across space and time. We touched.
Us.
Concord.
We are blessed.**

Voice 2:

"..... No more words. Away! Go, away!" (MND 4.2.42)

[Optional further ending]

Voice 1:

Go now, and as you go know this:
in grace you were created,
in mercy you have been sustained;
in love you will be held for ever.

ALL: Amen.

**In our coming and going,
the peace of God;
in our seeing of the world,
the wisdom of God;
in our end and new beginnings
the love of God to welcome us and bring us home.**

Music plays: "Peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near"

A key to the voices (for those who would like it)

1. Leader of liturgy 2. Bottom the Weaver (and, once, Peter Quince) 3. Hermia 4. Bridegroom in 'Song of Songs' 5. Bride in 'Song of Songs' 6. Egeus 7. Theseus 8. Helena 9. Oberon 10. St Paul and the Author of Letter to the Ephesians 11. Demetrius 12. Titania 13. Snout the Tinker 14. Hippolyta 15. Lysander 16. Puck

Acknowledgements

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Sponsorship: The Templeton Foundation, Tim Collins, Dori Rockefeller

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Programme Notes

A brief guide to the liturgy

In this liturgy different voices mingle together, speaking words taken from the worship-traditions of the Christian Church, from the Hebrew love-poem 'Song of Songs' (part of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures), and from Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The voices combine to encourage those gathered to 'see more clearly with the eyes of love'. The need to 'see' properly runs throughout Shakespeare's play, and is a prominent theme in the New Testament.

Stages in the liturgy are marked by headings. The first is "**Coming together in search of love**". Words from the New Testament and from Shakespeare's play are used to gather the congregation, followed by Hermia's protest against being asked to choose love 'by another's eyes'. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* she is being forced to marry Demetrius by her

father, while she loves Lysander. Her friend, Helena, loves Demetrius but is spurned by him. Words from the 'Song of Songs' celebrate love, while lamenting that we sometimes seem to have lost the one we love.

"Failure to see with the eyes of love" continues the plot from the play, where characters fail to see each other properly. Notably, Hermia's father does not see with her eyes of love, and Demetrius fails to see Helena's love. Jesus, in a passage from the Gospels, accuses people of thinking they see, when they are really blind to the truth. Helena reflects on her faithfulness in love, and the Magnificat becomes *her* song. In the section **"Dark forces are released by the failure to see clearly"**, Puck's sinister activities lead to prayers of confession and intercession.

In **"The mysterious gift of seeing with the eyes of love"**, Bottom the Weaver, transformed for a night into an ass and a lover of the Fairy Queen, Titania, expresses his sense of wonder by misquoting from St. Paul: 'eye has not seen what God has prepared for those who love'.

There follows **"The healing of sight through a willingness to be disturbed"**. In the play, the lovers' confused love-sight is healed by further confusion – through the magic flower-juice applied to their eyes which at first creates havoc. Words from the New Testament appeal to the hearers to allow themselves to be disturbed by the gospel of God's love, that turns the world upside down. There is an opportunity for response in the action of **"The Cleansing of Eyes."**

"With clearer eyes, we see that walls of division remain", and this is realised by Titania in her poem, reflecting on her conflict with Oberon. In the play, the rough workmen, led by

Bottom, present a hilarious version of the ‘tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe’, ending with Bottom’s quotation from the Letter to the Ephesians, that ‘the wall is down that parted their fathers’ – the scripture affirming that this happens through the cross of Christ. The congregation is then invited to share in **“Breaking down the walls that divide”**, and this symbolic act leads into prayers for situations where walls still stand.

Finally, in **“The coming of peace to those who will dare to see clearly with love”**, the actor playing Demetrius in Shakespeare’s play reflects that, the play over, he is left to face the future in his bare humanity. He and we join in the Nunc Dimittis, ‘Lord let your servant depart in peace.’

— *Paul S. Fiddes*

Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

The life force of Shakespeare’s drama swells from the ground up to ‘ascend the brightest heaven of invention.’ To his ground-plot of rural and civic life in Stratford, with its traditions, folk memories and celebrations, Shakespeare added the old tales of a classical past learned at his grammar school. He rode the upward surge of his middling-sort inheritance to an energetic city, full of incomers and strangers like himself. His was a disruptive voice in the burgeoning life of the playhouses: he was, after all, the ‘only Shake-scene in the country.’ He flourished in the shared space of the playhouse. Under the heavens, painted and real, the ground/stage was a place where anything was possible (at least for a time) as long as actors and audience agreed that it should be so, shared a vision of what might be. As people of all ranks and from all civic

spaces came together to share in Shakespeare's storytelling divisions appeared and disappeared as easily as actors changed their costumes and slipped from role to role.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare gathers his characters into a single space where he weaves their stories together. The distinct communities of the play at first appear to be divided rather than united. The classical, courtly, leisured aristocrats are the lawmakers and lawgivers. The skilled, urban artisans are loyal to their ruler and subject to the law but they get a lot of pleasure from mimicking their 'betters' and desire their moment at the centre of court life. The fairies come from the depths of a shared folk memory, their lives track those of their human counterparts and their own lore/law gives them the power to disrupt and enchant. Who are the in-dwellers? Who are the incomers?

In each community there's discord. Young lovers are pitched against parents and ruler; that same ruler finds himself at odds with the law he's supposed to enforce. The amateur actors bicker about who should play which role, who should be centre-stage and who should be a walking prop, who should speak and who shouldn't. A bitter argument forged in jealousy disrupts nature itself. Their lives and stories are linked but how much can these communities 'see' each other at the beginning of the play?

Love can mix us up, make us see one thing for another: a defeated warrior is a wife; the desire for a father's wealth is called love for his daughter; a beloved boy becomes an object of possession, a test of love. But when one heart truly recognises another with deep sympathy and understanding,

then love clears the sight and we can acknowledge what we share as lovers, wives, husbands, friends, community and family and move towards reconciliation, an authentic 'common-weal'. The love that sees clearly can penetrate to a 'most rare vision', so 'strange and admirable' that it is 'beyond the wit' of us all to say what it is that we have seen. In a shared space, discordant voices find their way to harmony. Performance produces concord and an awareness of shared, possibly enhanced, vision. The rarest of visions is granted to the 'lowest' characters.

— *Lynn Robson*

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