

*Order of Service  
September 22, 2019  
September Shadow Tag*

*Musical Prelude*

*Greeting -- Czeslaw Milosz: "Faith: Shadows and Light"*

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## **Greeting:**

Good morning, Friends. I begin our worship today with a poem by

*Czeslaw Milosz: **CHESS WAAUF MEEWASH** was a Polish-American<sup>[5]</sup> poet, prose writer, translator, and diplomat, who won the 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature. **MEEWASH** survived the German occupation of Warsaw during World War II, tackled questions of war, morality, politics, history, and faith throughout his life and work, and died in Kraków, Poland, in 2004. The Swedish Academy, in its Nobel citation, described him as a writer who "voices humanity's exposed condition in a world of severe conflicts". This is his poem, entitled Faith:*

**The word Faith means when someone sees**

**A dew-drop or a floating leaf, and knows**

**That they are, because they have to be.**

**And even if you dreamed, or closed your eyes**

**And wished, the world would still be what it is,**

**And the leaf would still be carried down the river.**

**It means that when someone's foot is hurt**

**By a sharp rock, he also knows that rocks**

**Are here so they can hurt our feet; it is in their nature.**

**Look, see the long shadow cast by the trees;**

**And flowers and people throw shadows on the earth:**

**What has no shadow has no strength to live**

Today as we worship, let us consider all that lives with strength enough to cast a shadow. Let us consider the shadow, and the light and the life that give it birth.

And let us begin with **our first hymn, God who is Father, Mother, Green 287.**

## **Readings:**

**A combined excerpt from Franciscan priest Father Richard Rohr's daily meditation, from September 10th and 11th, in which he quotes extensively from the book *Owning Your Own Shadow*, by Jungian psychotherapist Robert Johnson, who died in 2018.**

*The shadow in and of itself is not the problem. The source of our disease and violence is separation from parts of ourselves, from each other, and from God. Mature religion is meant to reconnect or realign what our egos and survival instincts have put asunder, namely a fundamental wholeness at the heart of everything. Robert A. Johnson wrote: We are all born whole and, let us hope, we will die whole. But somewhere early on our way, we eat one of the wonderful fruits of the tree of knowledge, things separate into good and evil, and we begin the shadow-making process: we divide our lives.* It is useful to think of the personality as a teeter-totter or see-saw. *In the acculturation process we sort out our God-given characteristics, putting those that are socially acceptable on one side of the seesaw and the ones that do not conform on the shadow side. This is wonderful and necessary, and there would be no civilized behavior without this sorting out of good and evil. But the refused and unacceptable characteristics do not go away; It's an inexorable law that no characteristic can be discarded; it can only be moved to a different point on the seesaw. . . .The fulcrum, or center point, is the whole (holy) place. . . This is one of Jung's greatest insights: that our visible selves and the shadow selves come from the same source and exactly balance each other. To make light is to make shadow; one cannot exist without the other. To own one's own shadow, to balance the dark and the light, is to reach a holy place—an inner center....To refuse the shadow is to refuse one's own whole personhood, made in the image and likeness of God ...To reject the dark side of one's nature is to store up or accumulate the energy of this darkness; suppressing it doesn't make it go away. When it has been hidden long enough, it takes on a life of its own. *It is the despised quarter of our being.* We are presently dealing with the accumulation of a whole society that has worshiped its light side and refused the dark, imbalancing the see saw, and this imbalance reveals itself as great fear, war, worsening economic chaos, pathological greed, racial intolerance, *violence, imprisonment of refugees, and ecocide.* We must be whole whether we like it or not; the only choice is whether we will incorporate the shadow consciously and with some dignity or by force of neurosis. Any repair of our fractured world must start with individuals who have the insight and courage to own their own shadow. . . . The tendencies of scapegoating and blaming -- to see one's shadow "out there" in one's neighbor or in another race or culture or religion -- is the most dangerous aspect of the human psyche, from ancient to modern times. . . . We all decry war but collectively we move toward it. It is not the monsters of the world who make such chaos but the*

collective shadow to which every one of us has contributed. God grant that our evolution may proceed quickly enough for each of us to accept our own dark side, place it there beside our hard-earned light, and find the center and balance between. This would be true holiness.

**Psalm 139** 1O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. 4Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. 5You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. 7Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? 8If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. 9If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, 10even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. 11If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,” 12even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. 13For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. 15My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. 17How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you. 19O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me— 20those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil! 21Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? 22I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. 23Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. 24See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

***Prayer***

*Holy One, God Who is Father, Mother, Guard and Stay...Mid all the traffic of the ways, so many turmoils without and within...we come together by your grace again this morning, and we ask you to make of our hearts a quiet place. We ask that you dwell here with us, that we may know as we are known. May we witness to you, to Infinite Love, as you witness us, in tears and fearfulness, in laughter and loneliness...in silence and song, we reach for you and know you reach for us. So may we carry this grace with us as we go forth again mid all the traffic of the ways. May we know faith in the wholeness of your Good Creation....the holiness of your Good Earth...the belovedness of we your children, both fearfully, and wonderfully made. In fear and wonder, faith and need, we cry and pray, and sing to you today, Holy One, amen.*

***Benediction***

*May we know we are children of the Holy, Holy, Holy One, to Whom darkness is as light. May we know we are created in God's image and likeness, called to be as we must be, fearfully and wonderfully made.*

*May we learn what wholeness and holiness are, shadow and light proceeding from the center, from the same source.*

*May we learn faith.*

**Message** When my boys were young, I remember their delight when they discovered their shadows. We would make our shadows touch, hug, kiss, hold hands, bonk heads, and we would play shadow tag, running, and jumping, trying to step on each other's shadows, and keep our shadow away from the other's feet. It was a strange feeling, having to pay attention to my shadow as if it was part of me, considering where it was, aware of moving my whole self, shadow and all -- it made me more cumbersome, larger, and more vulnerable. I remember their joyful cackles when they stepped on my shadow's head, and their screeching when I had their shadow on the run.

I thought of my little guys running gleefully over the earth, their shadows in hot pursuit, this week, as I watched the world's children and young adults name the long spectral shadow cast by industrialization, colonialism, war-making, extreme materialism and extractive capitalism, the long legacy of carbon dioxide accumulating in the earth's atmosphere, and as I learned from scientists at Cornell's Lab of Ornithology and elsewhere that 3 Billion North American birds have disappeared over the last forty years, a pall of loss thousands of miles wide. I thought again of shadow tag as I drove to Hector, on the other side of the lake, one evening, and the sun's angle in its setting made objects and their shadows stand out in stark relief, side by side, as if pursuing each other, the trees and barns and houses lit suffused by an orange-gold light, and their shadows a mix of deep greens and purples. With the leaves on the trees just beginning to flame at the edges, it was like September had been distilled, captured in its essence, and its essence was brilliant light and definite shadow, darkness and light. And here we are at the fall equinox, after all -- the moment when the shadow and the light, the dark and the bright are literally and figuratively companions, balanced, as if on a cosmic see-saw.

Our opening poem suggested that faith has something to do with knowing that what has no shadow, has no strength to live. This is a very interesting phrase, strength to live. It calls to mind 'will to live.' Or Force of Life. Life Force. Put another way, faith means knowing that what has life force, what has LIFE, big L LIFE -- That Which Exists, which has the fact of existence, the strength of actuality, will cast a shadow, by virtue of its existence. Existence, itself is the realm of faith, says the poet...faith is knowing that things are because they must be, they are called to be, made to be, as they are, as is in their nature. And what has a nature has an existence, a strength to live, which means it casts a shadow. Like us, and sharp rocks upon which we stub our toes, and trees, and buildings, and the institutions housed in buildings, and their regulatory agencies and their governments, and their ideologies, and their money, and the people who work in

those institutions, and their cars, and their houses, and their children, and their dreams and their desires, their fears. Everything with that inner fact of aliveness, everything that actually IS, casts a shadow. The shadow is part of the whole. And faith, as the poet explains, and Richard Rohr offers to us, faith puts its attention there, at the fundamental wholeness at the heart of everything, shadow and all.

Psalm 139 says that To God, to the Holy, to the still point in the center of that cosmic see saw, *even the darkness is not dark; the night shines as the day, and darkness is as light to God*...It is interesting that it doesn't say that light is as dark...but that darkness is as light. That seems like good news, for the faithful and fearful. the Psalm begins, "*Oh Lord You have searched me and known me,*"...and sings for 18 verses of the inescapability of God, the magnitude of God, the ever-presence of God, from the highest mountains to the deepest depths, since before time, before self, before thoughts and language, from the realm of the dead to the furthest reaches of the sea, the psalmist tries to fathom the parameters of God's reach, but he cannot, because God has no parameters...testifying in the 18th verse with something almost like exhaustion, almost like a game of shadow tag that has gone on a little too long -- he groans? Sings in awe and praise? Or sighs with gratitude? with resignation? -- "I come to the end—I am still with you."

and then in the 19th verse this psalm abruptly, disturbingly, violently shifts, as, out of left field, the psalmist entreats God to kill the wicked, whips himself into a fervor of hatred, spitting out a desperate prayer "that the bloodthirsty would depart from me--those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil!" ...asking rhetorically 'do i not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?' ...and then feverishly assuring *himself* -- Because he already established that **God knows** his thoughts -- that indeed "I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies..." There are four distasteful, shadow-filled verses before he ends with a verse that echoes that beginning in which he **was searched and known**, and now finally, at the end, he begs: "*please Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts...See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" It seems like he suspects there is a wicked way in him, like he fears that that is the case. If there is any passage in the Bible that grapples with the shadow side, with the bifurcation of light and dark, with what it is to be a child of God, struggling to be both whole and holy before God...this is it. It ends drained and prostrate before the Holy One to whom *darkness is as light*. To the Holy One, to the One Who is Holy, still and in the center, shadow and bright are as one, both proceeding from the same source and center. To the Created One, to us, and to the ancient singer of this psalm, it does not feel that way.

So, when we read the Book of Life, and the Book of the Bible, when we behold the continuing revelation of the world and read the messages and the signs of the times and the seasons, and hear God speaking in the garden we've been given, and see the message of balance and harmony between dark and light in the cells and soul of the earth and stars, in the concrete astronomical fact of the equinox, when we observe the effects of denied consequences and suppressed truth-telling that has resulted in ecological crisis on so many fronts, and consider the actuality, the energy, and the reality of the shadows that have taken on a life of their own in our world today, what, Friends, canst we say?

We might say that our faith and our fear, the measure of light and life we are given, cast a long shadow, backward and forward in time...We, the spiritual descendents of the royal writer of the psalms, live lives that flare with a brilliant light, light that can be seen all the way from the dark of space, in fact. and oh the things we can create, the astonishing breadth of our creativity: we are an amazing species, made in the image and likeness of God...and this utterly bewitching strength of life we are given **cannot** exist without its shadow, does not exist without its shadow...And it all makes me wonder about God's perspective. The Holy One to whom darkness is as light..what does God see, in this golden autumn, this September in the two thousand and 19th year after the birth of Jesus, in this human-made age of never-ending, 24-hour light, this Anthropocene era, as our shadows lengthen, as children and seas rise. Maybe to the God who is Father, Mother, and the fulcrum in the center, it looks like a game of shadow tag, and we look like beloved children running with delight and exhilaration, the dark smudge of our shadows following us like a companion, a friend on a see saw. Maybe, like children, we are learning to be whole, to know what wholeness and holiness are, to feel down to the tips of the fingers on our shadows that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Maybe, like children, we still think we have all the time in the world to learn what faith is.