

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!" Instantly recognizable even today these are the opening lines from one of the most popular detective radio shows in history, *The Shadow*, which ran from 1930 to 1954. The Shadow operated mainly at night as a mystery man who practiced vigilante justice. His character provided the inspiration for the "Bat-Man" comic hero and was the forerunner of TV shows including *The Equalizer* on now with Queen Latifah as a modern day female vigilante hero.

Shadows rarely evoke positive feelings. As children we feared the monster shadows under our beds. For thousands of years storytellers in many cultures tell of a man who becomes so frightened by his own shadow that he tries to run away from it. He believes that if only he could leave it behind, he would be happy. The man grows increasingly distressed as he sees that no matter how fast he runs, his shadow never once falls behind. Not about to give up, he runs faster and faster until finally he drops dead of exhaustion. If only he had stepped into the shade and sat down to rest, his shadow would have vanished.

20th-C psychologist Carl Jung coined the term "the shadow self," which describes the unconscious parts of the personality that our conscious ego doesn't want to acknowledge. Our shadow self is part of us. Our own personal shadow is made up of what we find unacceptable, our deepest, darkest, ugliest secrets. The more we feel flawed and unlovable, the more desperately we run from the clutches of the shadow; yet, by running from what we fear, we feed the inner darkness.

But shadows and darkness aren't our identity as Christians. Today is Christ the King Sunday. We sing of "kings, crowns, thrones, worship, honor, power, and blessing." How do kings and kingdoms relate to all this talk of shadows?

Several pictures inspired my thoughts today. We're all familiar with this famous section of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, God's creating Adam, the emphasis on the hands, the fingers almost touching. All was good until Eve's freewill choices and that pesky apple.

And that's when Jung would say our shadow self appeared. Shame, guilt, woundedness. Some people run from these strong, negative feelings through denial, keeping busy, drugs or alcohol, playing the victim or simply giving up. They are without faith or hope or a belief in a Power greater than themselves. The OT is full of ways humans tried to outrun, confront or deny their shadow selves: wars, adultery, whining, bragging. On the other hand God's chosen nation, Israel, relied on faith like Hannah's, hope like Eli's, prophets like Samuel to lessen the impact of the shadows.

Part of the Good News of the NT is that God sent Jesus to reaffirm for us for all time that he made us in his image; there is a piece of the divine in each of us. We are indeed "Good!" Jesus was overcome with great compassion when people coming to him struggling with the effects of their shadows. Jesus sees our struggles too, this minute, right here in this room. God

keeps reaching down into the shadow parts of our being to resurrect us from the messes we make through our violence, lies, selfishness, arrogance, and our addictions. When we stop running, confront our shadows, and bring them in prayer before God he has a chance to work miracles.

The light of God keeps loving us out of our shadows.

When Pilate asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews, Jesus seems to hedge. “My kingdom is not from this world.” Even though he is a descendent of the hero king David, Jesus claims no connections with nationalism or monarchies. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” The next verse is left out of today’s reading. Pilate asks “What is truth?” Probably his tone was skeptical, not genuine questioning. But the answer to Pilate’s questions brings us into God’s Kingdom.

I’ll admit part of my shadow self is an aversion to top down authority. I don’t like being told what to do. A king ruling his kingdom has ultimate top down power. For me earthly kingdoms evoke images of knights with swords and lances defending their country in battle. The monarch evaluates his subjects by how loyal they are to him (or her). How does Jesus turn the conventional idea of a kingdom upside down? Jesus’s kingdom rests in the image of God and God is love. Jesus’s symbol of power is not a golden seal of authority making life or death decrees, but the towel of a servant washing feet. So the truth is that God evaluates us—the subjects of his kingdom— by our acts of compassion and mercy to others. He judges our devotion to him by how we treat each other. Jesus reigns, not over a “king”-dom, but rather a “kin”-dom. Everyone in Jesus’s realm is kin, like a relative or close friend.

We celebrate the kin-dom of God because through Jesus the light of God’s love streams into us, fanning the divine spark w/in us. It heals our shadows so our souls can now become a place of deep compassion and truth, not of arrogance and power. We feel at home. For followers of Jesus Christ, the Kin-dom is not some faraway place or some distant future time. This is our kingdom too, right now. When we stop running from our shadow we sit in the light of God’s love and fear no more. God is accomplishing his kingdom this moment with our help, through our prayers and talents, by our willingness to spread the light of God’s love to those on the fringes of society. Eventually we see that all of life is, as Richard Rohr put it, an unfinished symphony, or a divine dance.

The Shadow may think he knows, but we know for sure that it’s God’s light of love and truth that dispels the shadows within us. We use our pieces of Light to pierce and heal the dark places we encounter among the people we meet every day. If we just open our eyes we’ll see signs of Christ’s Kingdom already happening and we can be part of it.

God’s hand reaching for ours. Our hand reaching for God’s. Choose Light. Choose Love. Choose Jesus, our servant-King. Follow his Way to help bring about God’s kingdom, power, and glory NOW and forever. Amen.

