That time of year thou mayst in me behold

When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang

Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,

Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day

As after sunset fadeth in the west,

Which by and by black night doth take away,

Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire

That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,

As the death-bed whereon it must expire,

Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,

To love that well which thou must leave ere long.[1]

The leaves are falling off of the trees, the sun is setting, the fire is reduced to glowing embers. Shakespeare is growing old, and he knows that his life will, sooner rather than later, come to an end. And what is perhaps even harder to accept is that his beloved also knows this fact. Shakespeare describes himself as seen through his beloved's eyes: you may have noticed, he says, that I am getting older. My strength is waning, my energy is dimming. We both know where this is headed, he says, and there is nothing we can do about it.

But the last couplet of the sonnet saves us from total despair. Shakespeare says, "This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong/ To love that well which thou

[1] Shakespeare's Sonnet 73

must leave ere long." Knowing that Shakespeare will die doesn't scare his beloved away; it actually makes his beloved's love for him stronger. It is a testament to their love, that impending death only deepens their bond. "To love that well, which thou must leave ere long." The final line of the sonnet is a challenge to us: can we too, love that well, which we must leave ere long?

This sonnet reminds me of Sukkot. Summer is (mostly) over, and fall is here. The days are getting shorter. Soon the leaves will change color and drop off of the trees. And of all of our holidays, Sukkot is the festival that most clearly highlights the need to face impermanence, not just with resignation or even acceptance, but with love. We build *sukkot*: fragile, temporary structures. We shake the lulav and etrog, rejoicing by holding the branches and fruits of once-living things that will be dry and brittle by the end of the week. And of all the holidays, Sukkot is the festival on which we pay the most attention to *hiddur mitzvah*, to beautifying or enhancing our mitzvot. So we don't just build a hut to live in for a week; we decorate it, we bring our nice dishes into it, we celebrate in it. The Talmud teaches that the etrog must be beautiful to be kosher (BT Suk. 31a), and Jewish tradition has many folktales about the lengths that Jews would go to in order to buy the most expensive and attractive etrog. It might seem silly to spend so much time and money and energy on something you only use for one week, but therein lies the lesson: it is all temporary, and in spite of this, or because of this, we invest our care and love.

On Sukkot, it is customary to read the book of Ecclesiastes, which recounts King Solomon's struggle to answer the age-old question: what's the point? He tries different paths, searching for fulfillment, but all he comes up with is futility. He amasses wealth,

and sees that he can't take it with him. He gains wisdom, and realizes that both the wise and the foolish will meet the same end. He sees that very often, the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, and that, ultimately, they too meet the same end. Again and again, he comes up against this truth: whatever we do with our lives, whatever we accomplish, we will all eventually die. So, he concludes, if this is all we have, we'd better make the most of it while we have it. "Go," Solomon says. "Eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy… Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment. Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun–all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life…. Whatever is in your power to do, do with all your might" (Ecc. 9:7-10). It might sound like Solomon is advocating a life of hedonism, but I don't think that's quite what he's saying. I think he's reminding us that life is finite, but that shouldn't cause us to despair; it should motivate us to appreciate it, to enjoy it, to make the most of it, up until the very end of it.

Shakespeare – and Solomon too – knows that watching someone you love get old or sick is incredibly painful. It is understandable to try to protect ourselves from the pain of losing them, either by distancing ourselves from them or by denying what is happening to them. But we can choose another way. We can accept the fragility and finitude of human life, and choose to love anyway, to live anyway, as best we can. This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong/ To love that well which thou must leave ere long.