

10 30 22—The Courage to Cross
UUFM—Rev. Rita Capezzi

Our Soul Matters theme in October is Courage. So let us explore together—through story, poetry, music, costume, and our own personal experience—what courage can mean.

Lately, I have been trying not to use an alarm clock. It's a risk. Living by clock time is critical when you have a job, when you have a medical appointment, when you make a date with a loved one. We don't want to be late. We don't want to miss it.

Today, I did use my alarm clock, for we are poised at a convergence of commemoration—Samhain, Halloween, Dia de Muertos, All Saint's, All Souls. Some of these holidays are indigenous—to Mexico and to the Celtic lands. Others are Christian days amalgamated onto those earlier celebrations. All of these days, Christian and so-called pagan, they have influenced and cross-pollinated each other. Either way, in the Northern Hemisphere, this is a time of year to be rooted in earthly, material ways. Holidays and holy days take us out of clock time and allow us to sink into earth time, universe time, the time of natural rhythms that the clock time messes with. The harvest is ending, the last dry corn stalks in the fields just yesterday, likely gone today. Despite the daytime temperatures, the nighttime ones tell us winter is about to be upon us. This is a time of year to be rooted in earthly material matters. The way our ancestors are rooted in the earth—dead and buried or scattered, simply elemental and molecular again. Our Ancestors—some forgotten but present to us still, some we wish we could push away from us forever, their nightmare selves forced far back, out of memory. And also, those ancestors we claim, those not strictly in the bloodlines but whom we hold dear.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, our world is one world. We are all connected—dead and alive, distantly and closely related—both by our awareness and desire, as well as by our existence as part of nature. We are never apart from nature and the web of existence. All of our blood and bones made of the minerals and the elements of earth and universe, all of us star dust and involuted with each other. The nightmares and the beautiful dreams and the everydayness all wrapped up in and within us. "Don't pretend that earth is not one family. Don't pretend we never hung from the same branch. Don't pretend we do not ripen on each other's breath. Don't pretend we didn't come here to forgive."

When we make time for the dead, we might feel that we are shouldering them, carrying them, as in this poem, "Cello" by Dorianne Laux

When a dead tree falls in a forest it often falls into the arms of a living tree.

The dead, thus embraced, rasp in wind,
slowly carving a niche in the living branch,
shearing away the rough outer flesh,
revealing the pinkish, yellowish, feverish inner bark.

For years the dead tree rubs its fallen body against the living,
Building its dead music, making its raw mark,

wearing the tough bough down as it moans and bends,
the deep rosined bow sound of the living
shouldering the dead.

Yet when that cello sound moves in your chest, moves in your heart, through a resonating chamber, we may carry our dead, we may carry the inevitability of death, in ways that lighten the load rather than weigh us down. "All around you, people will be tiptoeing through life, just to arrive at death safely. But dear children, do not tiptoe. Run, hop, skip, or dance!" While we do not simply adopt another cultural practices, like using marigolds and ofrenda and monarch butterflies to honor our dead if we are not Mexican, we can learn about such practices on the way to making some of our own. Our costumes take us out of the ordinary and they offer a way to laugh at what frightens us and they connect us to practices older than ourselves, still vital. From our own ethnic pasts, we can reclaim those practices in our memories, in the family photos. The dead and how to honor them, "They touch our lives time and again, through their presence and their absence. As the earth turns and leaves fall, we reach back to renew the bonds between us." Let us take the risk, move out of the ordinary time, allow in the dead and the wisdom they teach us. Allow us to learn from them how to be and live, and especially learn from them what we will not do, how we will not act! "Today we are called to recognize all saints." As we are called to "learn to recognize the sainthood in all others and the sainthood in ourselves," may imperfection and risk and possibility be our aim.

And so, allow the boundaries between us—living and dead, related all—to melt in this brief space of time outside of the clock, as in this poetic meditation, "Boundaries" by Hue Walker. In Celtic Mythology, this world and the Otherworld lie alongside each other nested together like the layers of driftwood or of a seashell, Their boundaries shifting and permeable, The crossings simple acts for gods and birds and mythical adventures for humankind.

We guard these entryways with charm and ritual and shiver at their mention,
whether in fear or in longing.

The worlds are stitched together at the edges,
Dawn, dusk, the first day of winter,
or summer,
or a life,
The edge of the sea, a riverbank, the horizon,
the mouth of a cave, or of a grave.
The stitches held by charm and talisman, and words of power.

And the Borderland of human boundaries...
More familiar, yet infinitely more mysterious.
The simple boundary of personal space,
The edge of "I" and "other,"

constantly shifting in size and shape and intensity.

The border of sound and music, word and poetry, utility and beauty.

And there is something delightful, and cherished, and divine,
In the human heart, which takes the bone from a dead bird, and shapes it into a flute,
and breathes into it and creates a bird's song!
And in this sacred act knows all there is to know of crossing boundaries.

May this season, this time of the thin veil, this playful time of crossing boundaries “Teach our spirits not to fear, bring our labors safe to birth”—labors of growth and transformation, labors of justice and liberation. May we be so blessed, and may we be a blessing, as you remember, today and every day, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so, may it be so, and may we say together, “Amen!”