

“Crossing Over”

A sermon by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden
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“Is it a boy or a girl?”

“Yes and no.”

Sing: *“A child is born among us and we feel a special glow.”*

A boy, blue. A girl, pink. Or is it the other way around? Or might it be something else altogether? Blue into pink, pink into blue, something else into something else.

For sure, it’s a child, a little bundle stretching, crying, hungry, trusting, reaching, yearning, yearning to be who this child uniquely is. Each child grows into a soul elastic, permeable, ephemeral, and embodied. It’s the body part that sometimes confuses us.

How we take refuge in our either-ors!

“They teach us to read in black and white,”

writes my colleague Leslie Takahashi Morris,

“...we are taught to think in either/or.
To believe the teachings of Jesus—OR Buddha,
To believe in human potential—OR a power beyond a single will.
I am broken OR I am powerful.”

“...We are taught to see in absolutes.
Good versus evil.
Male versus female,
Old versus young,
Gay versus straight.”

“Truth is this—the rest false.
You are whole—or broken.
Who you love is acceptable—or not.”

Who you are, who you really are, is acceptable or not.

“Trans” means crossing, as in transportation, transfer, trans-Atlantic, transgender. It holds the assumption of a “here to there,” which in turn presumes the validity of a “here” and a “there.”

A gift will be transported from Connecticut to Wyoming. We might hold up the interconnected web, but we tend to concede that Connecticut isn't in Wyoming and vice versa. One might transfer their allegiance from the Yankees to the Red Sox or vice versa. It's rather easy to claim that neither is in the other's ballpark. We take a trans-Atlantic flight; some call it "crossing the pond," yet another here to there. And you may have been born to all appearances a girl. But you grow into not just your body, but your psyche, your soul, and something stirs within you, something that won't let you go, whispering deep inside you, "You're not a girl; you never have been." You yearn to have, in your soul's reality, "your body back."

In speaking of these matters, I'm stretching my imagination, confessing that I'm speaking outside my arena of personal experience and intuitive knowledge. I can speak only from what I observe and what I hear and what I know about anyone's identity, beginning with myself. We become who we are.

If the forces of culture or religion or family resist that drive, a child's blossoming is thwarted. What a tragedy, not to be free to become who you are and to be who you are. A girl or a boy? A woman or a man? A person who is so determined to claim soul-identity that she/he, he/she will dare to cross a great cultural divide, a gauntlet of religious dogma, and commonly a punitive familial chorus that claims one must be either/or, and if you are born "either" you can't be "or."

I'm wondering if we're not all born "and."

Another way of putting it is "omnigender." Drawing on biology, anthropology, religious history, biblical analysis, literature, and more, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott makes a strong case for an "omnigender society." In a work published 13 years ago, Mollenkott deems "gender normality [as] a myth as long as it is forced to locate itself within a binary paradigm that fits very few members of the human race." (ix) She notes that as many as four percent of all babies are born intersexual, that is with ambiguous "gender organs." Gender, she claims, is a social construct, not a biological or even a universally cultural or religious construct. It is the injustice wreaked in the name of "two sexes-and-that-'s that," which drives Mollenkott to call for "a new gender pluralism, a nonhierarchical omnigender paradigm."

Leslie Takahashi Morris had more say:

"...Life embraces multiple truths, speaks of *both*, and of *and*.

...Let us see the fractions, the spectrum, the margins.

...The day is coming when all will know

...That the margins hold the center."

Like race, gender is a social construct, caught and twisted in the throes of power and privilege.

Transgender is a loaded term, but no more so than gender itself. Bridging a divide between what one experiences oneself to be gender-wise and what one is said to have been born as is often a life-threatening risk, but the risk of not doing so is perhaps more life-threatening when considering the import of being true to one's soul.

Crossing over carries a double entendre. It may refer, in muddy ambiguity, to crossing from the gender in which once was born to the gender one experiences oneself to be. And because of the gridlock notions of those among us who can't wrap our arms around gender ambiguity and what we might call "soul conscience," thousands have been threatened, brutalized, and murdered over the moral minefield of human history—well over a thousand in the six years that we've been counting.

Crossing over also suggests moving from life as we know it into the mystery that lies beyond. "Crossing over Jordan" refers biblically to the ancient Israelites crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The reality evolved into metaphor, so that "crossing over Jordan" came to be understood as what one must do to enter the Promised Land of the hereafter. Crossing over is moving from life "across death" into the hereafter.

Today, as we consider what it means and doesn't mean to "cross over" from one gender to another, we light candles in memory of those who crossed over in this other way, who were brutalized and murdered and crossed over because they crossed over. I suppose we might call this a double-cross, a profoundly tragic double-cross because of the failure of habituated humans to move beyond our own understanding of who we are in all our remarkable variations. If we are children of a God of Love or children of the miracle of Life or both, we carry sparks of a sacred Love that is neither male nor female or transgender or even omnigender, but beyond gender. It is through the transforming power of Love that we can sing from the bottom of our hearts and the breadth of our minds,

"How could anyone ever tell you—you were anything less than beautiful?
 How could anyone ever tell you, you were less than whole?
 How could anyone fail to notice—that your loving is a miracle?
 How deeply you're connected to my soul.
 How deeply you're connected to my soul."

Let us "dedicate our minds and hearts to the spirit [and wholeness] of [each and every] child."

So may it be and Amen.

Sources:

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