Scarlet Tanager 2

Listening to J.J. Cale on a virus-free run
To the HEB (I hope), remembering driving
Across northern Mexico on my way to Juanita’s.

The desert landscape emerges from recesses
In some long-forgotten part of my brain,
An image of music playing and hawks on fenceposts,
An image of driving into the mountains to Juanita’s,
A mythical place along a Cypress-lined river,
A place where the parrots fly down in the evening,
The pairs moving across the sky together,
A place where I encountered the scarlet tanager
Up close and personal – stark red with black wings
Set against an emerald and blue background,
A place where I learned from folks like Pete Moore
And Jim Newman, two guys I grew up with,
Two men that really knew and loved their birds,
Men who were clear that it was perfectly ok
For a man to enjoy watching birds without a gun.

Today driving in Mexico is no longer viable,
Denied to me by narco traficantes – the cartels
That ended life as it was known in Mexico,
And now, in HEB, I see friend Pat and we both
Want to hug and we cannot,
Our expression of friendship,
Our expression of care for each other
Denied to us by the virus,
And it’s clear that change again is upon us,
Change that is tough for us all,
Change that demands adaptation,
Change that we must accept,
But it doesn’t mean I have to like it.

I hold onto the vision of the black-winged tanager
And of visiting Juanita’s
As I hiss at fate and forces beyond my control,
A hiss as forceful as I can muster
And it makes me smile and feel better
Amidst experiencing the changes.
The Scarlet Tanager

Down the coast in Rockport
Enjoying the spring migration.

The small wetland lies hidden,
A small ribbon of life-giving water
In a forgotten place where barbed wire
Hangs slack from the crooked fencepost.
Beneath the hackberries, palmettos spread
Over and onto the water like a lily pad,
Dark green, even black, within the shadowed space.

Peering in, we are rewarded to see
The immobile red and black migrant
Barely standing on the frond upon the water,
Weak from its travels across the Gulf,
White sand glued to its breast
From its exhausted landing on the beach,
Testament to the ordeal completed,
Too tired to move,
Needing a restful place to take food and water
To continue its trip north to breed
And travel south again,
Eyes never leaving us
As we slowly move past.

The wetland’s a lifeline to the migrant,
A wetland that remains today
By luck, by happenstance,
Yet without this wetland sliver,
Without this water meadow, the tanager
And its migrant brethren will perish,
Their fate dependent upon us and
Our willingness to set land aside,
Our willingness to protect
This chapel in the church of the Earth.

So welcome to Earth Church
Pull yourself up pew
Say a prayer for the wetland
And for yourself too.