

also by anne lamott

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# Plan B

further thoughts  
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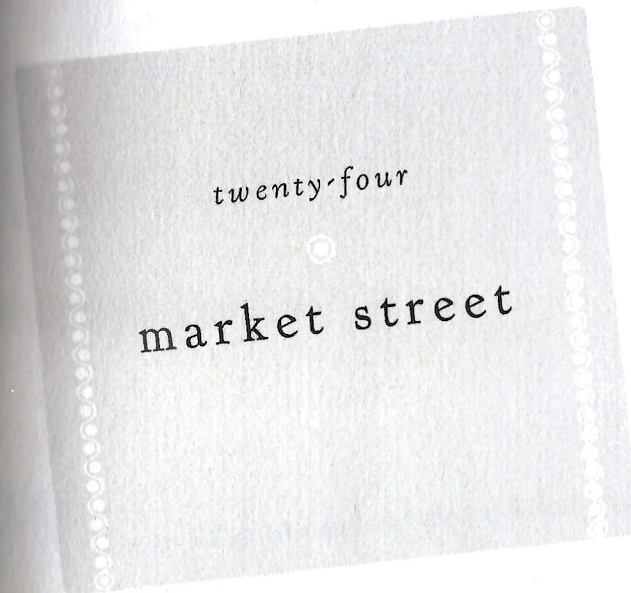
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New York

thin. Promise me you'll never wear pants that bind or hurt, pants that have an opinion about how much you've just eaten. The pants may be lying! There is too much lying and scolding going on politically right now without having your pants get in on the act, too.

So bless you. You've done an amazing thing. And you are loved; you are capable of lives of great joy and meaning. It's what you are made of. And it's what you're here for. Take care of yourselves; take care of one another.

And give thanks, like this: *Thank* you.



I woke up full of hate and fear the day before a recent peace march in San Francisco. This was disappointing, as I'd hoped to wake up feeling somewhere between the sad elegance of Virginia Woolf, and Wavy Gravy. Instead, I was angry that our country's leaders had bullied and bought their way into preemptive war. Hitting first has always been the mark of evil. I don't think one great religious or spiritual thinker has ever said otherwise. Everyone, from almost every tradition, agrees on five things. Rule 1: We are all family. Rule 2: You reap exactly what you sow, that is, you cannot grow tulips from zucchini seeds. Rule 3: Try to breathe every few minutes or

so. Rule 4: It helps beyond words to plant bulbs in the dark of winter. Rule 5: It is immoral to hit first.

I tried to pray my way out of the fear and hate, but my mind was once again a pinball machine of blame and hopelessness. I had planted bulbs a few months before, but they had not bloomed yet, and I did not want to get out of bed. Like everyone I knew, I was despondent about the war. And I wondered if I actually even believed in God anymore. It seemed ridiculous, this conviction that I had an invisible partner in life, and that we were all part of a bigger, less punishing and isolated truth. I lay there gnashing my teeth, sure that what you see is what you get. This was it. This earth, this country, here, now, was all there was. This was where all life happened, the up and the down and the plus and the minus and the world of choices and consequences. Not an easy place, but a place full of significance.

I clutched my cat as I used to when my parents fought, a life preserver in cold, deep water.

But then—a small miracle—I started to believe in George Bush. I really did: In my terror, I wondered whether maybe he was smarter than we think he is, and had grasped classified intelligence and nuance in a way

that was well above my own understanding or that of our era's most brilliant thinkers.

Then I thought: Wait—George *Bush*? And relief washed over me like gentle surf, because believing in George Bush was so ludicrous that believing in God seems almost rational.

I decided to start from scratch, with a simple prayer: "Hi!" I said.

Someone or something hears. I don't know much about its nature, only that when I cry out, it hears, and moves closer to me, and I don't feel so alone. I feel better. And I felt better that morning, starting over. No shame in that—Augustine said that you have to start your relationship with God all over from the beginning, every day. Yesterday's faith does not wait for you like a dog with your slippers and the morning paper in its mouth. You seek it, and in seeking it, you find it. During the Renaissance, Fra Giovanni Giocondo wrote:

*No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today. Take heaven!  
No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. Take peace!*

And so I roused myself and went to meet some friends in San Francisco.

We milled around the Embarcadero, where you could see endless sky and ocean, and a Möbius strip of the '60s, a massive crowd gathered once again on sacred ground. Haranguers harangued us from various sound systems unimproved in the last thirty-five years, like heavy metal played backward at the wrong speed. But the energy and signs and faces of the crowd were an intoxicating balm, and by some marvelous yogic stretch, we all stopped trying to figure out whom and what we agreed with, and who the bad elements were: The socialist haranguers? The Punx for Peace, who had come prepared with backpacks full of rocks? The Israel haters? The right-wing Zionists? You just had to let go, because Market Street was wide enough for us all, and we began to march, each a small part of one big body, fascinatingly out of control, like protoplasm bobbing along.

The sea of people looked like a great heartbroken circus, wild living art, motley and stylish, old and young, lots of Buddhists, people from unions and churches and temples, punks and rabbis and aging hippies and nuns and veterans—God, I love the Democratic Party—strewn together on the asphalt lawn of Market Street. We took

small shuffle steps, like Zen monks in a crowded wedding procession. It was like being on a conveyer belt, overwhelming and scary, because you might trip and get stepped on, but once you were really on the street, you could sit by the curb and sob, or adjust to it. It's disturbing to not walk with your usual gait, to move at once so slowly and with such purpose. I felt I was trying to pat my head and rub my stomach at the same time.

The "I" turned into "we." You shuffled along with your friends, moving at the pace of the whole organization, moving to the heartbeat of the percussion. You saw people you knew, and hung out awhile, and then they moved away, and new people fell in step beside you, and offered you comments and gum. Whoever came along came along. The goodwill gave you a feeling of safety in this mob, a fizzy euphoria despite the grim reality of these times. Songs I've loved for decades were sung—"We Shall Not Be Moved," "Study War No More," "Give Peace a Chance"—and then we'd tromp along, and the peace-march wave rose again, a joyful roar of solidarity rippling out from the front, over us, then picked up by those behind.

There was gaping, and a lot of volition; you were swept along, but the crowd had a self-correcting mechanism—it

kept letting go of what wasn't quite right, the more raw, angry elements, the strident and divisive. It was a Golden Rule parade—you acted the way you wish the government would act, with goodness, and tender respect, and this held the peace. The splinter groups that went crazy later and trashed everything were peaceful when they were with us. I saw only friendliness, sorrow, goodness, and great theater. My favorites were the people dressed as sheep on stilts, who resembled huge silver masked-ball aliens, with horns and curly tinsel wool, like puppets that Louis XIV might have commissioned. No one had any idea why they were sheep, or why they were on stilts. Maybe they were peace sheep, and maybe they just wanted to see better.

The Women in Black moved solemnly in the middle of the throng, steadfast and profound, witnessing for peace. They dressed in black, like the Madres in South America. They stopped you with their presence, like punctuation, made you remember why you were here.

Two things carried the day: regular people saying no to power, and glorious camaraderie. We were sad and afraid, and we had done the most radical thing of all: we had shown up, not knowing what else to do, and without much hope. This was like going on a huge picnic at the edge of the fog, hoping you would walk through to some-

thing warmer. The mantra you could hear in our voices and our footsteps was "I have a good feeling!" The undermutter was silent, spoken with a sort of Jewish shrug—"What good will it do to do nothing?"

The barricades were broken down for once, between races, colors, ages, sexes, classes, nations. There are so few opportunities for this to happen—at first, it feels like us versus them, and then you're shoulder to shoulder with thousands of people, reading one another's signs, signs that pierce you or make you laugh out loud. You rub shoulders, smell the bodies and the babies and pot and urine and incense and fear, and everyone's streaming past, including you. For once, you're part of the stream, and in that, in being part of it, you smell the pungent green shoots of hope. The feeling may be only for the moment. But it's a quantum moment: it might happen again, and spread and spread and spread; and for a moment and then another, there's no judgment, no figuring out, just an ebullient trudge, step, step, step.

People sang, and babies cried, and your feet started to hurt, and you wanted to go home, and just then the broad-bottomed Palestinian women started chanting, "This is what democracy looks like. This is what democracy looks like."

Wow: that's the prayer I said the morning after the peace march: Wow. I felt buoyed by all those people walking slowly together down Market Street, by the memory of the peacenik dogs with kerchiefs around their necks, the Mothers in Black, and the Peace Sheep. Then, amazingly, only a few days later, the very first bulbs began to bloom. Within a week, there were dozens of daffodils in the yard. When this finally happens in late winter every year, I'm astonished. I've always given up. In November and December when I plant them, I get swept up in the fantasy that the earth, after so much rain, will be rich and loamy. Planting bulbs sounds like a romantic and fun thing to do, but it never is. The earth is rocky and full of roots; it's clay, and it seems doomed and polluted, yet you dig little holes for the ugly, shriveled bulbs, throw in a handful of poppy seeds, and cover everything over, and you know you'll never see them again—it's death and clay and shrivel. Your hands are nicked from the rocks, your nails are black with soil. December and January have been so grim the last few years, and this year the power kept going out, and everyone was crazy as a rat. Yet here we are in February, with war drums and daffodils everywhere, and poppies waiting in the wings.