

[00:04:15]

And so she thought about reaching out to her own pastor, but this was early on in Advent and it is a busy season for folks who are clergy. And so her pastor was away on some self care, R and R to prepare for the time of preparing for Christmas. And and Lamont wrote tongue firmly in cheek. She said, if we knew that we were going to hire a pastor who was so committed to their own boundaries and self care, we would have thought twice about what she's getting. And so her own pastor not being around, she decides she want to reach out to some of what she called God's other spokespeople.

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She called the ministers she knew and she said, talk to me about talk to me about God. And the other minister said, who's that? And she thought, OK, that's not very promising, moving on.

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And so she reached out to a Jewish friend of hers and she picked up the phone and she could hear immediately in the background this person's children keening and crying and all kinds of tumult in the background. And Anne Lamott still went on with it. She said, tell me about the preparation for the time of Hanukkah, the miracle, the Festival of Lights. And the friend immediately says, are you joking? Hearing the sound of the chaos in the background? And Lamott says, Well, I know you're I know you're reformed. And the friend shoots back. We're so reformed. We have a crucifix on the door of our house. So, again, not so much what an Lamott maybe was searching for in the way of peace and patience. And the friend says, call me back tomorrow as the kids are creating even more chaos in the background. Call me back tomorrow, she says, and I will talk to you about Hanukkah and the kicking out of the old invader's. The old Assyrian kingdom invader's thousands of years ago from the Holy Land and by the Holy Land. No, I don't mean Miami Beach.

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So an Lamott moves on to her next friend, another minister. And says, talk to me of God, talk to me of people who are doing all right, and the friend just kind of sighs and says, Oh, Bobby, you've you've got a you've got a big one there. And the friend says, this is what I know. Take care of God's children and God will take care of you. And Anne Lamont says, is that written somewhere, the friend says it's right there under what's called the special instructions for living.

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And Anne Lamott still not quite getting what she was searching for.

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Calls her friend Tom.

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Tom, who she describes as a hopeless alcoholic of the worst sort with thirty five years sobriety, Tom, who is a Jesuit. Tom, who she trusts because Tom is still very open, even after thirty five years of sobriety, that he can suffer with struggles over the images or at least the images that he believes about his body, and he can fall into despair at times. And so and Lamott trusts him because he is honest and real. And Ann Lamott, her Jesuit friend, Tom.

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Tell me of people getting well. Tell me a story of people getting well. And Tom pauses for a moment.

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And he thinks.

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And he says, this is my story of people getting well, this is my story of Advent. It was many years ago, it was 1976, and I was very newly sober.

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And terrified of everything.

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He said, at that point, I was living in California, I was living in what they called the time the People's Republic of Berkeley, and I kind of liked the meetings, the recovery meetings I was going to at the time, because unlike in L.A., where I was a little bit familiar with as well, too. And I think Anne Lamott was familiar with L.A. at that time, that the people in Berkeley, they didn't kind of whoop it up. There wasn't too much clapping at the meetings. It was kind of more sedate. And he found people like himself, kind of folks who had been in school real long time.

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And he said the problem was, is that in addition to being in early recovery and scared of his own shadow. He was transferred within his order, within the Jesuit order to Los Angeles. And all he really knew about Los Angeles. Where where the bars were in various parts of town, and so he was terrified even to leave his apartment for fear that he would see himself going to one of those bars again. Remember, he is in very early recovery. And so we called up his cardinal and one of the higher ups in his order and the cardinal said, I want you to search out Terry. Terry, it turns out, has five years of sobriety, which Tom says makes Terry God to me, couldn't even imagine that five years of

sobriety at the time. And so during this time, add Advent in 1976, he makes contact with Terry and Terry asks him, I want you to come and meet me at a at a men's meeting in downtown L.A. at the Episcopal Cathedral, which was located real close to what was called Skid Row.

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And Tom gets there and he meets Terry and he sees all the people hanging out in the courtyard of the church, people who look like real hard core alkie and addicts.

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People who look like they might be numbering their days of sobriety in hours, people who look like they're on the edges of society. People who look like they're barely hanging on. And the truth is, although Tom is fairly well scrubbed, he thinks he feels like he's barely hanging on.

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And although he has been told to seek out Terry with the five years of sobriety, Terry, as it turns out, is a complete introvert who has almost no social skills and is really, really awkward interpersonally.

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And so he's trying to make small talk with Terry, but it's not really working. And at one point, Terry simply asks them, So how are you doing?

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And he says, I am scared. And Terry says, yeah, gently.

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That's about right, and so there they are hanging out in the courtyard of the Episcopal Cathedral with all these kind of folks who look really down on their luck pretty much.

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And a door opens and Terri finds himself going up the stairs. Very, very long, narrow set of stairs.

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I think I said, Terry, I mean, Tom, Terri's in back of Tom and he's feeling his legs absolutely shaking.

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This set of stairs that feels almost limitless and in front of him, there's a guy also youngish about Tom's age who looks even shakier than Tom feels.

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And at one point, the guy in front of them who looks like he is perhaps measuring his sobriety in minutes, loses control of his bodily functions.

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And Tom says inside, I look like Edward Munch's The Scream, I just want to get out of there, I am nauseated and I feel Terry's gentle encouragement, easing me up the stairs because the guy in front of me doesn't seem to know that he has defecated on himself and they get up to the very top of the stairs before they enter this airless, windowless room. And the guy whose job it is, is to kind of greet people as they come into the meeting, kind of like a volunteer position. He's got a big shaved head and a big barrel chest and one of those big, bushy, vulga Viking mustaches. And he gets one whiff of this guy who's gone to the bathroom on himself and he vomits all over the place. And so now this windowless, airless room is filled with the smell of human poop and vomit, and everyone starts madly smoking cigarettes to try and get the stench off of them. And the guy who's gone to the bathroom on himself just kind of stumbles in and falls into a chair and everyone kind of starts to freak out.

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But not Terry.

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Tom just wants to run, this is too much to deal with. Terry goes over to the guy who's vomited, the guy with the big vulga mustache, he says, seems like you got a bit of surprise there, my friend. And Terry and the guy with the big mustache and the shaved head just start laughing. And Terri walks over to the man, so down on his luck.

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And he sits down next to him.

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And he says it looks like you've run into some trouble here, my friend.

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The man doesn't say anything, just nods and he says, we're going to help you out.

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Now, first, what they do is because this isn't the first time something like this has happened like this in this particular meeting, is Terri sends a bunch of guys off to get some towels and some kitty litter to start soaking up the effluvia.

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Not the first time this has happened there. And he gets Some men. Who are very early in recovery themselves.

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Some men from a nearby halfway house right next door to the Episcopal Cathedral.

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And they steady the man who's gone to the bathroom on himself and they guide him down that set of stairs and they bring him over to the halfway house. And they feed him. And they give him coffee. And they clean his clothes. And they care for him. And they give him respect. Now, these men who kind of themselves are barely hanging on.

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The kinds of addicts and alcoholics that are so often looked down on by society, they care for this man because he is one of them. He is one of their own.

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And back at the meeting.

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Tom says and feels for the first time something he has not felt in months. Which is a little tiny shred. Of hope. He sees the way that Terri has kind of calmly, gently, kindly.

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Turned everyone to action for care, and he said, you know what?

[00:16:12]

I was back in Berkeley. I thought everyone looked like this. Nineteen seventy six now, David Niven, very debonair British actor.

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And I thought I would get sober with people just like myself.

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Housebroken, overeducated and fun.

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But the truth he saw at that meeting. Was that was not to be. And more than anything, he thought he would be Tom would be restored to health overnight. And that was not to be either. It would be a patient process. A process that took some time.

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And some care. And some waiting. And in the midst of his fear.

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And that windowless, airless, smelly room, he found hope for the first time in a long time.

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And now addressing himself to Ann Lamott in the present tense, he says that is Advent to me. That God will set up a tent before us. In which we are all invited. In which we learn to get well together.

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That is Advent to me.

[00:17:42]

Not quickly. Not overnight. That is my Advent story.

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And he signs off by saying, for you, Miss Crabby and for me. For us together. In time.

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That is an Lamonte story about that.

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Makes me think of. My life about 15 years ago when I walked up a different set of stairs here in Pennsylvania.

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Not nearly as smelly, but I was just as terrified. I walked up that long set of stairs into a windowless, airless room. Because I had to face. My own alcoholism. And I remember in the first couple meeting someone saying we take everyone from Yale to jail here.

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And I remember saying I got one of those and a guy in back of me I didn't even know then said I've got the other I guess maybe looking at my clothes, he was guessing which one, which can always do.

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In this case, he was right. And we kind of laughed together.

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I remember feeling that little shred. A little glimmer of hope. Then maybe I would know what it would mean to get well. And that it would take some patience. And some time.

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And it did. And it has worked and it continues to.

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But I also think more broadly about us as well, to not just those of us in recovery. About this moment of being alive. Of the last four years. Which has felt.

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For those of us who set our hearts upon peace and and justice and compassion as felt that those things have been under assault.

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And at this moment, at this turning of the year, that perhaps things these problems that are much bigger than just the last four years, that perhaps peace and justice and goodness and compassion.

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That these things may have more than better fighting chance again. And I think of the last now almost 10 months of this pandemic and seeing the images of the vaccines roll out. Hearing about people I know who know other people who are starting medical providers to get the shot, the inoculation. And maybe for the first time in a long time, we were feeling some hope. And yes, we know as well. That it won't be overnight, that the pandemic ends and in fact, right now, with the numbers skyrocketing, there is more death and more illness in our midst and there will be for some time. This is what I love Ann Lamott's adventure story. Because on this morning, one day shy of the solstice. The day with the least sunlight of the year. And time of the year when many of us feel ourselves wanting so deeply, more sunlight and more light in our lives. I find it so heartening to receive this remember this reminder to remember, to look for both light and love in small and meaningful life saving patient ways. It reminds me of one of my favorite readings for Advent, the solstice time of the year.

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And from the great psychiatrist Carl Jung. Who says we become enlightened not by imagining?

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Figures of light. We become enlightened. By making the darkness conscious.

[00:22:05]

And so in these days. The challenge and the promise. Even if that promise seems small. May we allow? Our eyes. And our hearts. Time to adjust. So that hope and goodness and peace. Compassion and justice.

[00:22:32]

That these things can take root and grow in our lives. Even in the midst of winter.

[00:22:43]

Amen. And may you live in Blessing

[00:22:51]

I invite you to join your heart with mine in prayer right now.

[00:23:04]

Emmanuelle the Divine with us within us. The divine.

[00:23:13]

The spirit that might feel distant in many ways these days in the midst of all this struggle and all of this suffering. We allow ourselves to have a sober hope.

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The hope that. Even in the midst of winter. Allows us to plant some seeds.

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Seeds that are not miracle grow. Seeds that take time. To become what they are intended to be.

[00:23:54]

May that hope that seeding hope take root within us this day. So that we can in time. All grow into the people in this world. That we hope to be.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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