

Thanksgiving

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Sometimes Thanksgiving is the loneliest day of the year, and you just want to be part of a family, loud and boisterous and warm.

Sometimes Thanksgiving is the liveliest day of the year, and you just want to be alone, quiet, and still.

Sometimes you have grand plans and even grander menus, and the rolls flop and the casserole is too salty and the dessert is just...blah... and the kids suddenly become vegan.

Sometimes you have expectations for meaningful conversations and fun party games and, instead, everyone is staring deeply into his phone or watching TV.

Sometimes your heart is missing a person you love. Maybe you know you'll see him or her again. Maybe you know you never will. And there's an aching current running underneath all of your laughter and words today.

Sometimes you want to be home with the people and food and traditions you love, and circumstances keep you apart. And no matter what the substitute you choose that day, it's still just that: a substitute for what you desperately long for.

These days can be beautiful. And these days can be so difficult. So these days, whether your heart is overflowing and everything has gone perfectly, or whether your heart hurts with a physical, pulsing pain for someone you love, let us be kind. To others, but also to ourselves. Let us listen to each other's stories, even when the details are not our own. Let us seek a quiet corner alone if we need to, or let us seek out other people even when it feels needy.

If these are the hard days, hold onto the hope that there will be lovely, memory-making, exhilarating days ahead. If these are the good days, hold onto those moments to treasure and cherish when the rough days come.

So, if it's not a Happy Thanksgiving for you, here's to a brighter and better one ahead: next week, or next month, or next year. If it is the Happiest of Thanksgivings, soak it in and celebrate it, and be very gentle with those for whom it may not be. Because we cannot control much in this wildly spinning world, but we can show each other a little more love and kindness today, and that in itself is something to be thankful for.

Jessica Moore Otto is a wife, mother, singer, teacher, and runner.