

2020: A year of pain - and possibility

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As the year draws to its long-awaited end, now is the time to find common ground and embrace hope for the future.



This was a crushing year. For months, we have carried the weight of a pandemic, divisions both personal and political, enormous economic challenges. “Unprecedented” is one of the words of 2020. Unprecedented deaths. Unprecedented loss. Unprecedented fear. No one is entering 2021 unscathed. We have suffered a collective shock and trauma. Yet somehow, even amid all this pain, there is possibility.

Covid-19 has brought our vulnerability to the fore. It has also brought out the best in us. As a people, across the globe, we have consistently displayed courage, ingenuity, kindness, and perseverance. In one of the most horrifying events to happen in decades, we came together. We came together to support each other, resist inequality and stand for something. Stand for the good in humanity. As the virus resurges we still yearn for the return to normal. But there will be no going back to the life we knew before the pandemic.

In many ways, we are building the basis for a better normal. 2021 may well be our opportunity to cast off oppressive paradigms and antiquated social constructs. These past few months have not only forced us home, but compelled us to re-evaluate our own values, how we live, and what we want and need. We are creating a new way of showing up in the world. Whether we helped feed someone suffering or reached out to friends or family from afar, we understood the consequences of our actions. In these months, we understood that we are all human. Our frailty has shown us the importance of unity and understanding amid isolation and division. We are only here for a short time – and the only way we survive is through compassion.

Covid-19 is not a momentary mark in human history. Its impact will be felt for years to come. But we can use this experience as an opportunity to reconcile our differences. If we can come to recognise the roots of our own perspectives, we can see each other in a new light. We can lean into our vulnerabilities and fears, and learn to be comfortable with discomfort. It's within that space that we allow compassion to guide us. Coming to the table, with our pain as the centrepiece, we can begin to truly acknowledge each other. No, we will never all agree. But we can learn how to be wrong, how to ask for forgiveness. As long as we make it our intention to reach out and understand, we will appeal to the better part of our humanity.

At the end of the day, we all want a future. What that looks like is different for everyone. But we have the power to fight for a future that serves us all. History has shown that we only succeed if we work together. What tomorrow holds is unpredictable – and that is where possibility lies.

In her book *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit writes: “When you recognise uncertainty, you recognise that you may be able to influence the outcomes – you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists.”

While 2020 has thrown us into extraordinary circumstances, people have still stood up for the betterment of our health, environment, and society. The citizens of Belarus continue to protest against authoritarianism and oppression. Australia contained the wildfires that had ravaged the nation for months. Renewable energy is on track to overtake fossil fuels. Calls to address structural racism gained velocity and spread worldwide. The United States saw record voter turnout. Healthcare workers continue to put themselves on the line to save others. Vaccines are on the horizon.

This has all been achieved with a choice. Change is the result of individuals recognising that we can do better, that our future rests with our community. In the face of death, we have made a commitment to life. In the face of political turmoil, people voted. In the face of the climate crisis, we are changing our behaviours.

Healing is easier said than done. Unity may be a pipe dream we will not accomplish in our lifetimes. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. To give up would be to feed into our base instincts, to allow fear to override our potential. If we choose to approach each other with the willingness to understand, we embrace the prospect of hope.

For us to thrive as a community, nation, or globe, we need to acknowledge our own vulnerability. Active compassion may be the thing that differentiates us as humanity. And it's what will guide us into our new lives after the pandemic. 2020 was the reckoning. 2021 will be the reconciliation. We must never forget the pain and losses of this year, or what it has taught us to hold onto. While the future is unclear, one thing is certain: we depend on each other.

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