

2020 Has Shown Us the Way Forward



We all need to feel safe, to be safe; we all need quality food and clean water; shelter; clothing—to have our basic needs met. (Photo: Illustration by Page Light Studios/Adobe)

By [Zenobia Jeffries Warfield](#) | [Common Dreams](#)

You must find a way to get in the way. You must find a way to get in trouble, good trouble, necessary trouble.”

– Rep. John Lewis

Three people in my family passed away this year within four months of each other: my brother-in-love, from an 18-month battle with cancer; my closest maternal aunt, unexpectedly, from a heart attack; and my fun-loving paternal aunt, from complications with COVID-19.

My sissy, my younger sister—who is a health care worker—was viciously attacked, earlier this month, by an unhinged patient while working. She sustained injuries that landed her in an

emergency room and requires subsequent therapy—physical and mental.

Hundreds of thousands of people can share similar stories, if not more heartbreaking ones. After all, at this writing, 316,844 people have died in the United States from COVID-19, and we lead the world at 17.8 million infections.

Illness and death are part of life. Violence, unfortunately, is too.

We grieve. We suffer. Any other year, I might have said these are all a part of the natural order of being human.

But this year has been excruciating.

We didn't show up perfectly. We didn't show up as experts. We just showed up. We proved our capacity to care for and love our neighbor as ourselves. For 10 consecutive months, nearly every person in this country, and most people around the world, have experienced grief and suffering so overwhelming that we've had no choice other than to turn to each other for comfort and support: financial, material, or just a kind word. And for those with no one to turn to, it became clear that connection to others is indeed a basic need.

It was crystallized, for me, that we are not individuals but a collective.

I've been thinking a lot about that: This interconnectedness between us—between humans. No matter where in the world we are, the complexion of our skin, the language we speak, the gods we worship, many of us have been experiencing the same fears, the same losses.

Of course, that's been true all along. But this year, this global pandemic has us on our knees at the same time. Whether in prayer or surrender, we're all calling on the goodness of each other, on a greater power outside of us and within us,

for the health and well-being of a loved one, for an income to feed our children, to pay our bills, for our small businesses to withstand this inevitably devastating economic collapse.

Communities have shown up for each other; state and local governments protected and provided for their constituents—even against the backlash from some; people in urban, rural, and suburban areas joined the national uprising for Black lives and against police violence. We didn't show up perfectly. We didn't show up as experts. We just showed up. We proved our capacity to care for and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Going forward, we must hold onto those images of who we are and continue to show up for, provide for, stand with, and protect each other. Because there are other images.

Domestic violence. Community violence. State violence.

Police killings of unarmed Black people—including children: 7-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones, 12-year-old Tamir Rice, 22-year-old John Crawford, 26-year-old Breonna Taylor, 46-year-old George Floyd, and countless others, some whose names we don't know. May we never forget them.

And then there are grown White men who call themselves Proud Boys attacking random people on the street and burning a "Black Lives Matter" sign they'd stolen from a church. Those images were reminiscent of White men generations before them slaughtering the Indigenous peoples of this land, hunting down enslaved Africans who dared to escape to freedom, and during Jim Crow pulling Black men, women, and children out of their homes and burning them.

I'm reminded, though, that even as I've had to unlearn the lies and propaganda taught to me via official U.S. history and cultural fabrications, so many are now on the path of unlearning and relearning the truth about our collective history.

This one year has laid bare our frailties, imperfections, and proclivities to be better humans together.

People have to be better about hearing the voices of those who have gone far too long unheard, particularly those who resist the labels—progressive, liberal, conservative, right-wing, left-wing, Democrat, Republican—placed on them.

It's really not complicated y'all: We all need to feel safe, to be safe; we all need quality food and clean water; shelter; clothing—to have our basic needs met.

This one year has laid bare our frailties, imperfections, and proclivities, as well as the gaping inequalities, inequities, and injustices that continue to exist. Nonetheless, it has allowed us to witness our potential to be better family, friends, and neighbors—to be better humans together.

To whom much is given, much is required. If we can respond in crisis to be available to one another then we have the capacity to do the same to prevent crises. There's a saying in some Black communities, "I can show you better than I can tell you" —our riff on "actions speak louder than words."

As you spend time at the end of this year reflecting and setting goals for 2021, here's one to consider: "What one thing can I change about myself that will work for the good of all those in my immediate circle, extended family circle, community circle or neighborhood or workplace, local, state, national circle."

A new kind of social justice movement has risen above the misery of 2020, and it has taken root in our common humanity. It asks only that we keep our eye on each other and show up. Let's let it carry us forward into 2021...and beyond. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be an expert. Just find your post and hold it.



[Zenobia Jeffries Warfield](#) is an associate editor at YES! Magazine. She covers racial justice.

This article was written for YES! Magazine, a national, nonprofit media organization that fuses powerful ideas and practical actions. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License.