

Love over Fear - and Holding on to Hope

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[John Sturrock \(Core Solutions Group\)](#)

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"The only thing which will redeem mankind is cooperation" said the philosopher Bertrand Russell. Perhaps only a real crisis will enable us truly to appreciate what this means and what it takes.

The impact of the COVID-19 virus is seen by some to be akin to being in a world war though, as others have observed, military metaphors seem unhelpful. The extent of disruption may in fact be more extensive for many people. On this occasion, however, we are all in it together. There is a common threat. We cannot overwhelm it by force. We do need to help each other, to find a vaccine, to reduce the risk of infection, to provide support to those afflicted and so on.

Unless we choose to look for scapegoats, there is no us and them. This time, with a very few exceptions, no man or woman is an island. While we must do what we can to reduce transmission, physical borders and walls are a partial protection only to keep out that which threatens us.

Maybe, just maybe, this provides us with the very opportunity we need. Hubris and manipulation will have limited traction. Humility and honesty are the only currency. Leaders are emerging who manifest these qualities. The rest of us have choices. When we are fearful, the natural reaction may be to retreat into self-protection. Fight, flight or freeze. But we'll need to try and override that understandable impulse.

Thinking about the needs of others as well as ourselves will take conscious thought, compassion and kindness. That is what we need to do to survive, to get through this. What is in your interests is also likely to be in mine. What might that mean in families, in communities and in our nations? How does that fit with staying at home? It is in our mutual interests to reduce contact as much as possible. Can we find ways where minimal contact can be balanced with being, somehow, available to others, while still adhering to official instructions?

How we resolve such apparent dilemmas may be some of the biggest challenges in this whole experience. Let's keep asking questions and listening to others to ascertain their needs, hopes and fears. Let's acknowledge these and try to offer appropriate reassurance and help. Let's explore what we can realistically do for each other. Let's ensure that love prevails over fear.

Above all, let's hold on to hope. The hope of a future where we recognise that we - and the planet which sustains us - are interdependent, vulnerable and much in need of cooperation in order to survive.