

When the pandemic struck the reactions varied enormously. There was a lot of denial; centring at first on little more than an inconvenience in a Chinese province to something that was no worse than seasonal flu. Then there were the confident assertions that it would just go away...next week, next month, by Easter, by summer. At the same time there were apocalyptic assertions that this was a sign of the end of the world. Meanwhile the virus itself was simply doing its thing; replicating and moving from person to person.

But quietly, some people didn't get carried away by the hype, they simply did what they had to do. Health and social care workers risked their own lives to care for the sick and learned of innovative ways to reduce the mortality rate of the disease. Some scientists discovered tests that could tell if you had the disease, epidemiologists in some parts of the world then effectively traced potential carriers. Others scientists got to work on finding a vaccine and within a year of the arrival of the disease had produced, not one but several.

The old saying that necessity is the mother of invention has proved true once again. When the economy of the world faced an immediate threat, when survival meant huge debt we discovered that as a species we were up to the challenge. But of course this begs the question, when the threat is not so immediate; when the disease does not kill so many do we put in the same effort. Malnutrition, leprosy, cancer, dementia are all plagues that threaten millions but they do not damage the economy. The climate crisis threatens societal collapse but not just yet.

So the usual splits still exists between extreme optimists (it'll go in weeks) and fatalistic pessimists (there's nothing we can do, we're all doomed). And both sides can point to evidence that they're right and whichever side of the divide you find yourself on you can look at social media posts that you already agree with.

Coronavirus has actually done society a favour in a way by showing us that we cannot simply expect life to go on as normal. It has brought us together facing a common enemy. It has shown us that when needed people have the most remarkable resilience, fortitude and resolution. Most of us might also have issues that we feel need a similar united effort to overcome. Perhaps at the end of the pandemic is a time to ask what we think the world needs and what we as individuals can do about it.

Exercise:

- What in the world can keep you awake at night?
- Where do you think the next big challenge is coming from?
- What needs to be done?
- What part can you play?