

What is our role during a human crisis?

MARK PAVILONS

When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity. John F. Kennedy

JFK is also known for the famous quote: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." In recent weeks, we have all been asked to do things we were afraid of and unfamiliar with. We were asked to change our habits entirely, and stop being the social, interactive creatures that we were born to be. That's no easy task, as we've all found out during these weeks of social distancing, isolation and sporadic trips into the surreal world for essentials. Many of us have been glued to our TVs, watching daily speeches and press conferences from our fearless leaders, updating our plight. Yes, most often it's been a depressing, solemn path, a journey lined with death, sickness, limitations and economic peril. These things aside, many people can't seem to fathom just what their role is during a global pandemic. It goes back to JFK and his observations. It's about being part of the human race and joining your fellow countrymen and women in solidarity and unity. It's about doing what's right and what's necessary, to defeat a common enemy, and come out the other side stronger and more resilient. That's what we're doing here in Canada, and it has been working. Average citizens believe the government and our democratic system is here to serve us. We elect our politicians and put our faith in them to oversee everything in our great country. They work for us. In times of major crises, we rely on them to come up with the answers, the cures, the solutions and the stop gap measures. We count on them to not only keep us safe and secure, but to save us from drowning. We may have found out just how strong our social safety net is in this country. Residents and business owners in many other countries around the world don't get the financial support they need to survive. While it may not solve all our woes, the federal and provincial contributions to average citizens has been fair and generous. For the most part, as countries around the world have come together to share expertise, and our united stance has created something unique. We've put aside our differences, our conflicts and, to some extent, our violent tendencies, to progress through this tragic set of circumstances. And yet, as witnessed in other parts of the world and south of the border, people can't stand it when their rights are infringed. Some of our American neighbours have found the stay-at-home orders violate their rights and freedoms, as enshrined in their constitution. Our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms does clearly indicate we have a guaranteed right of peaceful assembly and association. Gathering with others, sharing ideas and commonalities are basic forms of liberty. We have the right to life, liberty and security and be protected by the law. The U.S. Bill of Rights guarantees similar basic freedoms and liberties. To our American neighbours, these are gospel. I'm sure other countries have something similar in their federal legislation. While our rights and freedoms are enshrined, it's important to know just what our role is during a crisis. Most of us today have never witnessed anything of this magnitude. Even those alive during the Second World War didn't encounter current measures. There are mechanisms in place to allow governments to take full control and suspend certain rights, in everyone's best interest. Fortunately, we haven't had to resort to that. Overall, I believe all levels of government in this country have acted properly and senior officials have kept up their end of the bargain. And the majority of Canadians have, too. That's the beauty of it all, although it's hard to see it right now. When have we ever come together, from sea to shining sea, and hunkered down, obeyed the strict rules and worked to help others? Okay, but the Toronto Raptors can only unite so many of us! As a fan of apocalyptic tales and stories, I find the abandoned city streets the stuff of great movie-making. But this is reality. And our absence is actually benefitting the planet we call home. Interestingly, the lack of human activity has improved our atmosphere, water quality, floral and fauna. It's as if the planet gave humans a sign, a message to take a breather from our noxious ways. One of the most interesting impacts of the pandemic is bringing to light, in plain view for all to see, our negative impact on our world. It's enlightening, shocking and humbling. Some stark lessons to be learned. We're all eager to get back to normal, whatever that turns out to be. If 'normal' means road rage, high stress levels, corporate greed, environmental destruction and selfishness, you can keep it! Some countries are relaxing social distancing to get their economies moving again. We will know very soon if it's premature. I've quite enjoyed the 'quiet' that COVID-19 has brought. I've been pleasantly surprised by the cordiality of my fellow citizens. I've also been shocked by the behaviour of a few bad apples. I've enjoyed the time our family has together and yes, we'd love to be out and about, but we can still take the dogs for a walk, enjoy family dinners and movie night (which is now every night). Instead of looking at the imposed restrictions as rights violations, we should take comfort that we're doing it for ourselves, our families, friends and the rest of our country.

