



Promises Promises

Katie Adams

Think back with me if you can to right as the pandemic was in full swing, those long dark days before the vaccine. We made a lot of promises to ourselves, trapped in an uncertain reality and faced with all of the choices that led to this moment. The pandemic didn't create but rather amplified the gross inequities teeming in American society. We needed to create, on the fly, emergency systems to shore up a fragile and ineffective patchwork of social safety nets—the strings of which are broken in far too many places.

Now that you're back in that headspace, maybe you can remember along with me all of the think pieces, speeches, and policy plans we talked about. We bemoaned our lack of critical public health and social safety net infrastructure and vowed that we had learned from the pandemic. Messaging then talked about how each action we take impacts other people, such as staying home to be safe and keep others safe. We used technology to widen the world and broaden the scope of who could participate in the public sphere. While we very much weren't in the same boat, we were all experiencing this storm together. And at the height of the pandemic, we made promises that the bitter lessons we'd learned about inequity weren't for naught. But now, years later, we have all but forgotten that new world we dreamed of.

Stymied by petty squabbles on patents and who would make money off the lifesaving vaccine, many countries have yet to be able to vaccinate their citizens. Nearly all the emergency COVID-19 protections—both public health-related and economic—have ended or dried up. Paid leave, what's that? Sick leave, or paying essential workers at least a \$15 minimum wage? Dead on the Senate floor. Free COVID treatment for the uninsured as well as robust tracking and treatment have been left by the wayside. You could pave an interstate with the articles talking about the need for childcare and how the labor of care falls mostly on women and especially women of color, and how women have been more

adversely impacted by childcare needs during the pandemic. But meaningful legislation and change haven't happened. The pivot we all made to online events, offering concerts and conferences online or hybrid are drying up too. And mask wearing in many parts of the country is not just unusual but derided. This means that a huge swath of the population is once again asked to absent themselves from society—and we're missing their important voices. Millions of people are still deeply at risk of severe impacts from COVID, and those same people are also at risk for other illnesses. Their contributions are invaluable and as a society, we're saying they're not welcome. This isn't new—this is the world as it has been. But remember those promises we made? The half life we're offering to people is thoughtless and cruel. It strips our society down to the lowest common denominator of acceptable care and compassion for each other. In our globally connected world, we exist in a fragile web of relationships with one another that is deeply dependent on your actions protecting me.

Like the masks that have been discarded and now litter our sidewalks and trash cans, the remnants of promises of care and compassion and a world reimagined litter the past few years. Like a rubber band stretched tight, the collective muscle memory of society bounced right back. This story doesn't have to end here. As people of faith, we are offered a gift of imagination and creativity, to see the world not as it is, but as it could be. It starts with us.</p>

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