

COVID-19, BLM and Religion
My story of 2020

Anna Dimmel

COVID-19, Religion, and Public Life Reflection

2020 was undoubtedly a year that marked us. Not only publicly, but for many of us, personally as well. I contracted COVID in March of 2020. It was still a “new” virus and there was limited information available to doctors and healthcare professionals at the time. I chose to be quarantined in my room in an attempt to keep the virus from spreading to my partner and children. However, after 21 days of running a fever and being unable to walk across the room without being depleted of any energy, I was consumed with fear. The news flooded us with stories of morgues running out of room, people being on ventilators and hospitals inundated with too many patients – all of them unable to breathe. The death toll continued to rise and nearly every city shut down. Every time I tried to take a deep breath and felt my chest tighten, a wave of sheer terror washed over me. For the first time in my life, I was genuinely afraid of dying. I found myself trying to figure out who would care for my children if I didn’t make it. I wept at night trying to hide my fear from my family as I wrestled with the reality of what could happen if I didn’t get better.



Day 13 of COVID-19

Luckily, after a month the fever subsided. With the aid of an inhaler and steroids, my lungs slowly came back to life. But, when I left my room and re-entered “life”, it felt very different. Our city streets were empty. My kids were in a full-time routine of school online from home. Relatives and family would meet through Zoom on holidays. Literally, nothing “normal” was present. April 2020 marked the beginning of re-evaluating my definition of normal. My definition of safety, my definition of friendship, faith and happiness all would be challenged.



First day out of the house in over a month

Just when I started to feel like I had my feet somewhat back underneath me, the news of George Floyd's death hit. With it came another wave of fear. As a mother of a brown child, I was hit with a reality I have tried to avoid most of my daughter's life. The reality that people of color, even when protected by a white mother, still face hardship, discrimination and systemic racism. As my own child, now a senior in high school began to tell her stories of the discrimination she faced while being raised in a predominantly white community woke me out of my denial. Although I am not a person of color, the realness of racism hit my front door. Everything I have tried to protect her from became a real and present danger. What surprised us the most throughout the protests and events that followed George Floyd's death, were the amount of people from our "faith" who denied the experiences of the black community. Even our friends and family did not believe my own daughter's experiences. As we navigated difficult conversations and the political tensions surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, we found ourselves slowly pulling away from people we had once felt were friends. Additionally, we felt lost in a faith we once believed in...how could those who say they follow a Christian faith based on loving your neighbor as yourself, not speak out for the black men and women dying in our streets?



A quarantined dinner home, my four kids having a fun "breakfast"

To say that 2020 sucked the life out of us would be an understatement. Our nation faced a reckoning on many levels. Who is your community? Who are your neighbors? What is faith? What is genuine love? For our family, we found that safety is in a much tighter circle than we once thought. We found that love and community look like friends, family and neighbors leaving meals on our front door step when I was too sick to leave my room. We found that faith looks like believing in a love that stands up for your black, LGBTQ or immigrant neighbor – even when those who you once sat next to in church disagree. We found that happiness is in our home around our kitchen table. With a family unit who is healthy, safe and loved. I don't believe anything will be the same after 2020; I don't know how it could be. But, for our family one thing is certain: we will never take our health or our safety for granted again. We have learned to slow down and have the hard conversations. We have learned to look fear in the eye and stand tall. We have learned to speak out even when people don't seem to be listening. We have learned that being silent to avoid discomfort, is a luxury we can no longer afford. And for my partner and I, we learned to embrace the courage to finally come out publicly.



My partner and I coming out publicly after the events of 2020

In many ways, 2020 drew a line in the sand. A line many of us can no longer pretend isn't there. Especially when it comes to religion and matters of faith; I am no longer appeased by words. I now solely listen to actions. When you choose not to wear a mask and risk giving someone the virus I endured, you cannot tell me you love your neighbor. When you choose to silence the stories of people of color like my daughter, you cannot tell me you love your neighbor. When you actively turn a blind eye to murder in our streets, you cannot tell me you love your neighbor. When you choose to discriminate a human being based on gender, race or sexual orientation, you cannot tell me you love your neighbor. For my family, this is now where we draw the line.