

The events of these past few months have brought to my mind the word “courage.” It is a quality that seems to have emerged in the behavior of a lot of Americans. It is also a quality that equally seems to be lacking in some of our fellow citizens.

Not all of us who are willing to show our signs, our faces, and our beliefs in a protest are able to do that. But, we can all do something, even if it is refusing to be silent when we hear someone make an unfair statement about other groups in our society, about policies and programs that are detrimental to our fellow humans, even if they are of other races, religions, or beliefs than those we espouse.

Sometimes, we confuse the words “courage” with “convictions.” It seems to me that this is wrong, and that it does not do justice to those who show real courage and also absolves those who only have “convictions.”

It is easy to give lip service to our convictions. We can expound over and over at length about what we believe, how we are standing up for social justice, for equality, for the rights of women, for a more humane immigrant policy, for a robust program of childhood immunizations—for any number of things that most of us regard as necessary and right.

But, if that is all we do, we aren’t making much of an impact. The number one action that too many of us fail to take is, of course, to vote. The percentages of Americans who actually cast their ballots in every election are abominably low. This is one of the simplest actions we can take to uphold those convictions we hold so dearly.

I can’t understand why people cannot “speak out” about their convictions. There is a saying—“the courage of one’s convictions.” What does this actually mean? One definition I read is: when one acts on one’s beliefs even if it means disapproval from others, even others whose opinions mean a great deal to us.

It seems to me that standing up for one’s convictions is necessary for those beliefs to be more than just words that evaporate in the atmosphere of disapproval by others or in a sense of not wanting to involve oneself in any controversy. The old saying that some people “go along to get along” is a perfect example of this lack of courage.

The time is past for such niceties as worrying that our views and beliefs will be unapproved by others. Standing up for what we

believe is always a necessary part of our responsibilities as citizens. These days, it is even more important than in the past. It is a time for a little courage from all of us.