

PASTOR'S NOTES. Coming Back through COVID.

“My sisters and brothers, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads.”

Galatians 6:1-5 (NRSV)

With the points made in this scripture:

- that we are charged to bear each other's burdens,
- but with a spirit of gentleness (I assume having patience with others is a big part of that),
- and understand that in the end each of us has to make our own decisions and way in life,

this is my take on our COVID situation right now:

SUMMARY.

Vaccinated people are no longer significantly at risk for COVID in any setting for the time being. There will likely be a booster shot needed in a few months to a year, but for now, by most people's standards, the risk is minimal.

If you have not been vaccinated, you have a much higher risk for COVID, though that risk continues to shrink. But now it is on you to decide how much risk you are willing to take.

I believe that this is the gist of what health leaders at the national and state level are trying to say. This appears to be the idea behind the loosening of health orders, and we can expect further relaxing down the road unless the hospitals become overwhelmed with COVID patients.

FURTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER.

TO ALL OF YOU, if you see a person wearing a mask (when it is not required), there are three reasons why this might be:

- 1- They have been vaccinated and are working on outdated information;
- 2- They are unvaccinated and are protecting other unvaccinated persons around them, and to a lesser degree, improving their own protection;
- 3- They have discovered with their allergies or other health conditions, that the mask helps them.

So consider this before assuming why someone is wearing a mask.

TO THOSE UNVACCINATED, there are plenty of people who are telling you what you should be doing, sometimes out of concern, sometimes out of confusion. Be patient with the rest of us. I understand that there might be a variety of health and other reasons why you are not getting vaccinated.

On the one hand, as a church where the majority of people have been vaccinated, we can honestly say that you are safer in church with us than in most other public places. On the other

hand, you have to determine how much risk you are willing to take. You can lower your level of risk by doing one or more of these things (in order of effectiveness):

- 1- getting vaccinated (if this is an option for you)
- 2- continuing to minimize the amount of time in public indoor spaces,
- 3- continuing to practice safe distancing,
- 4- continuing to wear a mask,
- 5- continuing to wash hands and sanitize touched surfaces.

TO THOSE VACCINATED, you might be one who still feels unsafe. We don't want to minimize this; you have many reasons beyond COVID to be concerned about your safety, and we want you to feel as safe as we are able. Any suggestions you can make that would help you feel safer are welcome. However, regarding COVID, the best information we have at this point suggests that there are far riskier things out there for you today.

On the other hand, you might be impatient with family and friends who are not getting vaccinated. Unfortunately we cannot make their decisions for them. It is they who are at higher risk, and they have to decide how much risk they will assume in their lives. The best tools we have for influencing others are listening and communicating love. After we do that, our opinion will bear more weight in their lives.

With all of this in mind, at Maple Street we will cautiously, over time, remove some of the safety measures we have been taking in the last year. We expect to make more mistakes along the way, but we pray that all that we do is in a spirit of gentleness and patience, and respecting our individual freedom of choice. And I pray that this is all done in obedience to the Lord Who loves us all and gave everything for us.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kam".