



We Were So Close

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Last August, I wrote an op-ed piece for the United Church of Christ's *Witness for Justice* blog, entitled "Spiritual Malpractice" in which I stated:

"Health care experts and scientists all agree that face masks, preferably made of cloth, hand washing, physical distancing and avoiding close contact gatherings especially indoors, are the best ways to prevent contracting the coronavirus.

"Yet the wearing of face masks has become a symbol of weakness by some political and religious leaders. Some pastors have encouraged congregational members to attend indoor worship services while stating that if we truly believe in God, God will protect us from the disease. Thereby suggesting that contracting Covid-19 is a sign of retribution for a lack of faith."

I was very clear that I disagreed with any theological concept that only faith in God would keep believers from dying of Covid-19, without following CDC guidelines. At the time of the writing, 166,000 deaths had occurred. I ended the article by saying, "When you see me wear a mask, I am saying 'I see you. I value you. I care for you.'"

This past April, my 97-year-old father-in-law, my spouse, and I received our second dose of the Moderna vaccine. We breathed a sigh of relief that our family was finally protected from this deadly pandemic that had claimed the lives of over half a million U.S. residents. In Massachusetts this spring, people were lining up to receive the vaccine in greater numbers than most parts of the country and by the end of May, our state was opening up and getting back to a resemblance of normalcy, even though it was still different than 2019.

We were so hopeful as we entered the summer that my husband and I took a trip to visit family in California in June, yet when we were there, we sensed something was wrong. We were surprised to find that most of my family had chosen not to be vaccinated and not to wear masks for an array of reasons. Then we began

to hear about the advent of a new, more contagious and dangerous strain of Covid called Delta. I did my best to urge my reluctant loved ones to reconsider their hesitancy of getting vaccinated, or at least to wear masks and follow social distancing protocols. I did so in the least judgmental way that I could, but the fear of losing family members to the Delta was gut-wrenching. People are dying needlessly, and it breaks my heart.

At this writing, 650,000 people have died of Covid-19 in the United States, and we are seeing a resurgence of hospitals overwhelmed with the sick and dying that we haven't seen since last winter. Though the Delta wave was initially called "a pandemic of the unvaccinated," the number of "breakthrough" cases of vaccinated people contracting, getting sick, and infecting others with Covid is also growing. The health care professionals are now advising: vaccinated or not, wear a mask, social distance, wash your hands, and stay home if you feel sick, until our country has "herd immunity" (when the number of vaccinated reaches 80-90% of the population).

At the beginning of summer, I thought we were so close in beating this virus. We still can beat it, with each other's and God's help.

And though I am vaccinated, I choose to wear my mask for the sake of others. When you see me wear a mask, I am *still* saying "I see you. I value you. I care for you because I want to see you live!"

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