Friends,

Thursday, the CDC came out with new data for the last week. The picture painted by this data is concerning. We are being inundated by another rapidly accelerating COVID wave. The country, North Carolina and Orange County are being overwhelmed with new cases of the BA.4/5 Omicron variant. I urge you to seriously consider temporarily re-masking during worship services until this wave passes.

We have never before seen a variant like BA.5. It is the most transmissible disease in medical history. It is also highly immune evasive and frequently capable of defeating antibodies, the first barrier of immune response.

Like the previous Omicron BA.1 wave, this wave is likely to be steep and short lasting.
• When you first look at the graphs of reported new cases things don’t seem so bad.

• We see the current number of new reported cases on the right hand side of the graph.

• There is clearly a bump in new cases and a slight rise over the past few days, but nothing seems dramatic.
Then you realize that now-days almost everyone uses at home tests whose results are not included in national data.

Epidemiologist believe the real number of cases are five to ten times greater than the reported number.

The range of the real number of cases is actually closer to the record high original Omicron peak in December. BA.5 is twice as transmissible as B.1.

As a reality check, ask yourself: Have you ever known so many people infected with COVID?
RISK OF CATCHING COVID-19

- **This current CDC map indicates the risk of catching COVID-19 by individual county**
- **All of North Carolina is at the highest level of risk**
- **This map should be used as guidance when deciding whether or not to mask indoors**
This current CDC Community Level map is used to help communities know when they need to work together to prevent overwhelming hospital census surges.

Orange County and much of eastern North Carolina is at the orange level and at significant risk of hospital surge.
Generally, the current variant, BA.4/5 does not appear to be more dangerous than previous variants, but it is so transmissible that it sweeps large numbers of victims into its net.

However, it is proving particularly dangerous to seniors.

Note the rapid rise of hospital admissions for patients over 70 years of age that is occurring as BA.4/5 rises to dominance.
WEIGH THE COSTS OF WEARING A MASK WHILE WORSHIPING DURING THIS SURGE AGAINST THE BENEFITS OF PROTECTING HOSPITALS AND SENIORS. MASK WEARING IS NOT SO MUCH A WAY TO PROTECT OURSELVES AS IT IS A WAY TO LOVE AND PROTECT OTHERS.