

We are just two blocks south of the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse. The UWL motto is mens corpusque which is Latin for “mind and body.” Perhaps this makes sense as UWL is known for its emphasis on medicine, health, and exercise majors. It has an emphasis—more so than any other school I know of—on the importance of bodily fitness.

But what is missing from this motto? As Christians we believe that we are not just mind and body, but mind, body, and soul. Now, please don't take this as a criticism of UWL; I don't think we need to start a petition to change their motto.

I think this motto “mind and body” gives us a window into the world in which we live. We as a society place a strong emphasis on education and intellect. We as a society worship those who have thin and flawless bodies. We spend billions on healthcare and upkeep of our bodies. But what about our souls, what might a society look like that has forgotten that we're not just mind and body, but souls also?

It might look a lot like the world we live in today. Gallup polls has surveyed Americans since 1940, for the first time in the history of the poll, less than half of respondents said they belonged to a church, mosque, or synagogue. We don't have the information on how many of those respondents were Jewish or Muslim, but we can assume that an even lower percentage than half of the respondents were members at a church specifically.

A world which only tends to mind and body but not the soul may look like a world filled with anxiety disorders, depression, and substance abuse to self-medicate fears and traumas. In 2019, 1 in 5 American adults struggled with a mental illness. A little less than 1 in 20 American adults seriously considered suicide in 2019. The pandemic in 2020 has brought many of these issues to the forefront with depression, fear, and anxiety skyrocketing.

I want to preface the rest of my sermon by saying that you can be a Christian and struggle with mental illness. You can be a Christian and have anxiety, depression, and fear. Christians can take medications to help with anxiety and depression. Christians can and should seek the help of professional counselors for mental illnesses and emotional disorders. If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide, you may dial 211 to reach a local suicide hotline. There are additional resources in the bulletin and the details section of this live stream, you may have to click show more to access the link.

With that introduction, let me proceed to the theme of our sermon. The sermon text is Jeremiah 1, and we learn "DO NOT BE AFRAID; I AM WITH YOU," DECLARES THE LORD.

First, The Lord declares to us, I. Do not be afraid, I am with you when I formed you (v. 4–5). We read in verses 4 through 5, “**Now the word of the LORD**

came to me, saying, **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”**”

The Lord spoke this to Jeremiah. He was known as the weeping prophet. Why? Because Jeremiah was sent to the people of Jerusalem to tell them to turn from their sins, but instead he was rejected, put into the stocks, thrown into a cistern to die, and imprisoned. Eventually Jeremiah would witness the destruction of Jerusalem, the Holy City of God. If anyone had a reason to be anxious, depressed, or afraid, it would be Jeremiah throughout his challenging ministry.

Yet even at the beginning of our text, we have this word of hope. It is as though the Lord said to Jeremiah: “I always knew you, Jeremiah.” “Even before you were born, I knew you.” **“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”**

Even though Jeremiah’s ministry was a tough one, it was a worthwhile one. God had selected Him from even before birth to preach his warning message to the nations. He could minister to Jerusalem fearlessly as the Lord God was with Him even from conception.

God always knew you and formed you in your mother’s womb. He has a plan for your life. Perhaps not many of us will become prophets or preachers, but nonetheless, the Lord God has been with you from birth. Psalm 139 goes at length to say this. The climax of Psalm 139 is verses 13–14 **“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”**

You are fearfully and wonderfully made even if you have a mental illness. You are fearfully and wonderfully made even with a mental or physical disability. You are fearfully and wonderfully made even if you have a debilitating illness or disease. You are fearfully and wonderfully made because the Lord Himself knew you before birth and formed you in your mother’s womb. This is a message of hope and love we can share with all those struggling with sin, doubt, and all variety of mental illnesses.

The Bible gives us a message of hope as it regards our minds, bodies, and souls. **“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”** DO NOT BE AFRAID; I AM WITH YOU," DECLARES THE LORD. God has made you a mind, body, *and* soul that you may glorify Him, that you may enjoy the plan He has for your life, even when it can be painful and hard to bear.

Which brings us to our second point, The Lord declares II. Do not be afraid, I am with you to deliver you (v. 6–8). We read this in verses 6–8 of our text. Jeremiah is hesitant to serve as a prophet as he is only a young man. **“But the**

LORD said to [Jeremiah], “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.””

Stress and anxiety result from us being put into difficult or impossible situations. Jeremiah’s task to preach to an unrepentant and sinful people could certainly have caused the same anxiety that so many of us in our time feel. But the Lord tells him, “Fear not! I will be with you to deliver you.” The Lord watched over Jeremiah throughout the ups and downs of his ministry.

What about you, are you afraid of COVID? Are you anxious about the latest COVID case counts? Are you nervous about the direction our country or our economy is headed? Are you worried about making ends meet or what tomorrow will bring?

The Lord has proven His love for you by sending His Son to die for you. You *were* bought at a price. The price was Jesus Christ’s lifeblood. Jesus Christ took on the punishment for the sins you deserve. On the cross He has borne your mental illnesses, your anxieties, your depression, and your fears. He has carried your griefs and sorrows. His actions on the cross prove that God is there to deliver you even in the here and now.

And so we hear the words of Jesus, “**And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**” God is with us, and as we gather here on Sundays, He is with us in the fellowship of believers. He is with us in the words of forgiveness proclaimed by the pastor. He is with us in the Word read and preached. He is with us in the bread and wine of communion as Jesus promises to be there bodily.

In a mind and body world that often neglects the soul, we need to hear that the Lord is with us, specifically as He comes to us through this Word and Sacrament ministry. Jeremiah needed to hear it and so do we. Gallup poll has asked year after year whether one would identify their mental health as excellent. The one group whose mental health actually improved in the pandemic was those who attended a religious service weekly. At the end of the article, the authors note, “Americans who attend religious services weekly are notably more emotionally resilient than those who are less religious.”

I mention this not so that those who would consider their mental health fair or poor would avoid worshipping with us. All are welcome here and I want to join you and walk alongside you in the midst of your struggles. But hopefully this is something to encourage us to keep meeting together to worship the God who formed us and delivered us.

For some, their mental health may never be excellent this side of the resurrection. Perhaps just getting out of bed may be a triumph depending on the day—even for Christians. But our Christian faith has a message for everyone no matter your mental health level. We are resurrection people, and we celebrate that

Christ not only died, but rose from the dead. His resurrected body is perfect. It is without pain. It is without sorrows. Jesus did not struggle with depression, anxiety, or fear.

So too, we as Christians will bear our crosses in this life just as Jesus suffered and died. We suffer with our ailments and illnesses unafraid because we know that the Lord is walking alongside us, to be certain. But that doesn't make life easy. We may struggle with certain sins, mental illnesses, or anxieties our entire life and these may be excruciatingly painful. Nonetheless, Jesus promises to walk alongside us and bear the brunt of those pains. Your life matters right now, even as we walk through this vale of tears.

Yet our Christian hope is that one day we will be raised up and be just like Jesus. We will be a resurrected, perfected body, mind, *and* soul that will not be sick. We will not need a mental health day, and will not be afraid, worried, or depressed. That is our Christian hope. That is why we keep coming back because even on a bad day, we know who to trust. “DO NOT BE AFRAID; I AM WITH YOU,” DECLARES THE LORD. Amen!

Mental health statistics: <https://mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america>

Church membership: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>

Suicide prevention: <https://www.lacrossesuicideprevention.org/get-help>

Mental Health 2020: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/327311/americans-mental-health-ratings-sink-new-low.aspx>

Mental Health 2021: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/357749/mental-health-rating-remains-below-pre-pandemic-level.aspx>