

Whole Minds – Philippians 4:4-9 – FMC – October 5, 2008

There is very little about the work of witch doctors I can support.

VERY little.

But witch doctors do get one thing right:

They know that the person is one,
and that every part is connected to every other part.

Primitive societies do not have one person in their tribe to treat
emotional difficulties,

another person to help bodies get better,
yet another person to teach spiritual growth,
and yet another person to help people work at
conflicts and relationships.

The medicine man, or witch doctor, treats the whole person.

On that point, they're right:

what affects one part of our being affects all the other parts as well.

I still remember how, more than 20 years ago,
a baseball and my throat had a collision.

The baseball was uninjured.

But my throat became constantly sore.

It hurt to talk. I couldn't sing.

It was a purely physical injury, in one sense,
but it just so happens that my throat is connected
to everything else that makes me me.

I started worrying about permanently losing my voice and becoming
a silenced preacher.

My spiritual health suffered.

I wasn't fun to live with.

It wasn't just that my throat hurt; I hurt.

Perhaps you can remember a time in your life when you had some kind
of disappointment:

maybe you didn't get the job you wanted,
maybe your boyfriend or girlfriend dumped you,
maybe your 401K took a nosedive,
and as a result your relationships suffered.

Perhaps you remember a time when a loved one died,
and your body rebelled.

You became miserable in your job,
and you felt far away from God.

You told that person that frustrated you, "You make me sick,"
and then you got sick.

All is connected.

The Bible says that when we are resurrected,
it won't be a disconnected soul that flies to heaven by itself,
but a resurrected, glorified body.

When you are resurrected,
you will be changed,
you will be perfected,
but the point is that ALL of you will be raised,
not just your spirit, not just your mind.

Inside of church buildings you hear the word "holy" a lot.
"Holy" comes from an Old English word meaning
healthy or whole, as compared with being ill.

A "holy" person is one whose fragmented life is made WHOLE
through a restored relationship with God,
so that mind and heart, body and spirit,
are all one, directed toward service to God and others.

Repeatedly in the Gospels, Jesus tells someone:
"Your faith has made you whole."
Such wholeness includes body, soul, mind, and relationships.

ALL the big Bible words are about being "whole":

“Shalom,” that wonderful Hebrew word, means
healthy, in harmony, peace, WHOLE, complete.

“Salvation” comes from a word that means “being made whole.”

The word for “saints” and the word for “sanctified” come from the
same word—“holy”—being made WHOLE.

Wholeness and holiness do NOT mean perfection.

Calling you a saint—which you are—does not mean you’re perfect.

Wholeness and holiness does NOT mean that all difficulties are overcome.

Mental health, emotional health, wholeness,
does not require a perfect body or a perfect mind or a perfect life.

You’ve read of Joni Erikson, who would never have chosen to be a
permanent resident in a wheelchair,
but who bears witness to a kind of wholeness that she never
had when her body was working perfectly.

Even in our struggles we can be whole.

In fact, the one who apparently has it all together,
who makes fun of or puts down others who struggle with their
minds or emotions,
it is THAT one who is not whole,
for they are unable to love their neighbor.

Don’t think of the health of your mind in either-or terms,
as “all or nothing.”

You see, ALL of us are at ALL times a mixture of mental health
and mental illness,
just as our bodies are at all times somewhere between
perfection and death.

Health is a continuum, and we’re all somewhere in the middle.
The Good News is that God is present with you wherever you are
on that line.

Philippians 4:5 says, “The Lord is at hand.”

That means that God is with you, walking with you,
wherever you are, whatever your state of mind.

God’s presence and God’s blessing are NOT reserved for those
in the top 10% or the top 50% of the mental health line.

God is just as present with those with obvious mental
and emotional struggles as with those whose lack of
wholeness is not quite so obvious.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is probably the best thing ever written
on mental health, on feelings, on stress, on wholeness.

Read it!

It’s a letter from a man in prison,
and in his letter he uses the words “joy” and “rejoice” 14 times.

Philippians is a love letter,
written out of love for Christ and for the people of God.

In spite of the most difficult of circumstances—
their prisons were not clean and well-lit like our prisons today—
Paul’s letter breathes peace, confidence, and hope.

It was written by one who was whole and holy,
not because he was perfect—because he wasn’t,
not because he had it all together—which he didn’t,
not because things were rosy, which they weren’t,
but simply because he had found in Jesus Christ
the center of his life, and his purpose for living.

“Do you want to be happy?” asks Paul.

“Then serve others, like Jesus did.”

“Are you feeling anxious?” asks Paul.

“Then take it to God in prayer, first thanking God for everything
you can think of to be thankful for,

then making your new request known to God.

And through the power of Jesus,

the peace of God will fill your troubled mind.”

Paul experiences wholeness because he feels no need to hide his feelings and his struggles from God.
He is not afraid that God will condemn him for not having it all together.
He's confident of God's love, God's unconditional love,
and so he lays before God the deepest feelings of his heart.

Paul is imperfect, and he is whole.
In that there is no contradiction, for him, or for you.

There's a phrase people sometimes use to describe a person who has good mental health.
I've probably used it myself from time to time,
but I've decided that at least some of the time,
it's not a helpful phrase.

"Well-adjusted." That's the phrase.
Are you "well-adjusted?" Adjusted to what?

It's a phrase that implies that you're an OK person,
mentally and emotionally, if you have adjusted yourself to something
external to yourself.

Now, if you're "well-adjusted" to the kingdom of God,
that's a good thing.
But that's not usually how the phrase is used.

Are you well-adjusted toward the ways of this world: /

Are you well-adjusted toward our society's tendency toward
individualism and selfishness?

Are you well-adjusted to our society's acceptance of sexual impurity
and unfaithfulness?

Are you well-adjusted toward our country's celebration of violence,
revenge, and war?

Are you well-adjusted to the American assumption that God is always
on our side?

Are you well-adjusted to the idea that much of your tax money is being spent to kill the people for whom Jesus died?

Are you well adjusted to an economic system that creates greater and greater gaps between rich and poor?

Are you well adjusted to the frantic pace of life in this country that allows no time, no space for quiet or for reflection.

Are you well adjusted to the idea that only those who produce are valuable people?

Are you well adjusted to the idea that sinners, and strangers, and foreigners, and people who are “different” ought to stay away from us and not bother us?

Perhaps, just perhaps, only those who are deeply troubled and disturbed by these things are healthy and whole.

Perhaps only those who are NOT “well-adjusted” and who DON'T fit in are the ones who are on the way to wholeness.

The Bible is FULL of people who did not “adjust” to situations as they were. The Bible is FULL of people who experienced true holiness and wholeness by challenging the systems around them, when those systems did not reflect the heart and priorities of God.

We are NOT called to be “well-adjusted” to sin, or to the fallen patterns of our world and its economic and political systems.

When we dare to admit that we're NOT well-adjusted to that stuff, others who consider themselves “well-adjusted” will wag their heads and whisper and point and criticize.

But in those cases, it is those who struggle with their place in a fallen world who will be made whole, for their search to have the mind of Christ gives them a different mind than that of many of their neighbors.

Keep Romans 12:1-2 in your mind:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed
by the renewal of your mind,
that you may prove what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Renewed minds, you see, are not those that know everything.
Renewed minds are not those that have reached some fantasy state
of perfection.

No, renewed minds are those that have made a decision—
the decision to give one’s whole self—
body, mind, and spirit—to God, as a living sacrifice.

A renewed mind is transformed not by become well-adjusted to sin
and brokenness and the status quo,
but by doing what Paul says in Philippians 4:8-9—
concentrating on truth, honor and justice,
seeking out beauty, purity, and excellence,
finding things to praise God for,
and then concentrating on those things.

Saints of God,
wholeness is yours through Jesus Christ.
Whole minds, whole bodies, whole beings.

Not perfection, but wholly and completely belonging to God,
wholly and completely responsive to God’s voice,
and to God’s transforming presence in the world.

None but Christ can satisfy.
None but Christ can make whole.