

To Be Made Well
John 5:1-9
May 22, 2022
First Presbyterian, Luling

Some of you may remember Ezequiel Herrera, who was the pastor at Faith/Fe Presbyterian in Lockhart for a few years. We did a pulpit exchange one time. He's now graduated from seminary and ordained as a minister. He's moved to the Rio Grande Valley and is working for the Presbytery down there to start a new church. He started work just before Covid hit, and managed to persevere through it all. He made connections with other Presbyterian churches and pastors. He connected with agencies of all kinds, particularly Presbyterian related ones like Puentes de Cristo. He learned about the culture of the Valley—he is originally from the Dominican Republic, so though he speaks Spanish, he's from an entirely different culture. He gathered a group of people during the pandemic, and they began worshiping together this March. They all live in the same neighborhood. They have church for about 45 minutes and then share supper together for another hour or hour and a half.

I was in a meeting with Ezequiel recently, and he was describing all of this, excitedly sharing how things are going and their plans for the future. Then he slowed down, took a deep breath and said, "It takes a lot of love and patience." Then he said, "Let me repeat that. It takes a lot of love and patience." I've been pondering his words ever since. Love and patience, it seems to me, are the keys to a lot of things. Starting a church, I'll just have to take Ezequiel's word for that. Pastoring a church, yes. Parenting a child of any age, yes. Being a spouse or a partner or a friend, yes. Living through a pandemic, yes. Love and patience, love and patience, love and patience. I'm starting to believe that Ezequiel has unlocked the secret of the universe. If only love and patience were easy things to do.

The more I think about it, the more I like it. So I would have thought that Jesus would be loving and patient all the time, right? Well, he is most all the time. Always always loving. But today's reading is one where Jesus is definitely loving and we have to look a little harder to find the patience. This is back toward the beginning of the gospel of John, where Jesus has several encounters with individual people, followed by a dialogue and then a long bit of teaching by Jesus. Today's reading is just the encounter itself. It takes place in Jerusalem, near a pool close to the Sheep Gate. Tradition had it that the pool had healing powers. Every so often—we don't know how often—the water stirred, and it was believed that

an angel stirred the water, and whoever got in the water first after that happened would be healed. That was the tradition.

The man that Jesus somehow chooses out of the crowd of people who are at this pool had been ill for 38 years. We never hear exactly what his ailment is, but it has affected his ability to move quickly. Jesus sees him lying near the pool and knows, in the way only Jesus knows, that he has been there a long time. His question is both loving and patient. "Do you want to be made well?"

The man then becomes less sympathetic, at least to me, because my own patience is short when it comes to whining. He doesn't answer the question! He says, "Well, no one will help me, and someone else always gets into the pool first." Jesus says, "Get up, take up your mat and walk." And he's well. Maybe Jesus's patience was short with whining, too, or maybe Jesus knows this is only the beginning of the healing the man really needs.

"Do you want to be made well?" It is a loving question, and a patient question. It's clear that Jesus sees this man clearly, immediately knows what his ailment is, and sees that he needs to be made well. Thirty eight years this man had been sick, presumably waiting for healing, but it seems like his hope had left him at some point. That needs to be restored too.

Wanting to be made well is a little more complicated than it seems at first. It seems like the man should reply immediately and enthusiastically with a "yes sir" or "yes please" or "oh, I would be so grateful." But over the course of those years, being ill has become who he is. If he's healed, who will he be? What will he do? Where will he go? It will be an enormous change in his life, and maybe that all occurs to him all at once and he isn't so sure after all. He'd made his peace with spending the rest of his days by this pool and it's such a big adjustment that he can't say "yes" without some reservations.

Jesus acts with grace and depth of love. This man never asks to be healed. He doesn't profess any sort of faith that Jesus can heal him. He doesn't even say thank you or go to worship in the Temple or praise God or anything that we have learned are conventional responses to a healing miracle. He just picks up his mat and walks. He later rats Jesus out to the authorities for healing on the Sabbath. He's not who I would have chosen to heal, is the most charitable thing I can say about this guy.

Jesus, though, has love and patience. Jesus shows love and patience. Jesus *is* love and patience. Jesus doesn't seem to need the guy to be likeable, to be deserving, to answer his question, to want to change, to be different or live differently, to be grateful. It is Jesus's nature to bring healing, so he does. He is

able to wait for whatever other changes there might be in this man's life. He's able to be patient not to see what he hopes for immediately. Love and patience.

Do you want to be made well? Do we want to be made well? Jesus wants that for us, because he loves us. Jesus is patient, too, and loves us even though we don't respond exactly as well as we might have. May God fill us with love and patience too—love and patience for others and love and patience for ourselves.