

February 6

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

John 4:46-54, 5:1-18

“Healing Stories”

1. My sister Delia started med school, but she decided it was not for her.
 - a. Growing up, mom wanted us all to go to college, have a career
 - i. My dad, being a teacher, highly valued education
 - ii. My mom, who only went to elementary school, always wanted for us to get an education, which would better prepare us for the world
 - iii. Of course, mom proved that one could have wisdom and knowledge which didn't come from a school, and a couple of my brothers did not finish college and yet found a way through in life.
 - b. My sister Delia went to med school
 - i. I'm not sure if she really wanted to go that route, but mom was so pleased
 - ii. I was young, so I have vague memories of Delia going to school and talking about her experiences
 - iii. I remember Delia talking about seeing cadavers as part of her schoolwork and I was mesmerized by that idea
 - iv. She must have been good at Anatomy and Physiology and was doing well
 - v. But then, a couple of years into Med school, she hit a wall
 - c. She has such heart and passion, and it felt too overwhelming
 - i. Medical school works differently in Mexico than in the States
 - ii. I think it is similar to Johanna Anderson's med school experience in Germany
 - iii. There is no four years of “pre-Med” and then Med school, but instead your college experience is entirely focused on medicine and science from your first year, and students encounter the core subjects early
 - iv. Somewhere about the third year, at least as I remember it, Delia started actually interacting with patients
 - v. And that's when she knew
 - vi. I remember her crying at home, sad because a woman she had been seeing in rounds, who had been battling cancer, had died.
 - vii. She had gone into medicine to care for people, to be in the healing community, but she found it too difficult to deal with the cases when, despite their best efforts, the therapies or medicines did not help the person recover.
 - d. As a multi-talented individual, Delia pivoted to a new career (multi-media, communications), and went on to have a very successful career as a Creative Director in ad agencies in the US, Mexico and Argentina.
 - e. She had to make peace with the fact that medicine was not for her.
2. Stories of healing are stories about community, and that is particularly true in Biblical healing miracle stories
 - a. In our passage from John today, we hear about the healing of two individuals, in two very different circumstances
 - b. Unlike other gospels, there are only a few healing stories in the gospel of John, which then makes one pay more attention to them as to why the writer chose to put them in

- c. These two healing stories are very different from each other
 - i. In the first story, in the north, in Cana, Jesus never meets the patient, only the patient's parent, who comes asking for healing
 - 1. The family is likely not Jewish, yet the royal official who worked for the Roman empire knows of Jesus' power and seeks him out
 - 2. And though Jesus criticizes in general the people's fascination with these very signs, from a distance, Jesus heals the boy who was sick
 - 3. It is the boy's community, probably his mom and others, who get to witness the turning point, and the father gets the good news of a healing that has already taken place, of a boy that has survived.
 - 4. The story mentions the official believed what Jesus said, and that the whole household came to believe in Jesus
 - ii. In the second story, Jesus goes to the patient, who doesn't ask to be healed
 - 1. Here we return to Jerusalem, where Jesus walks by a pool known for its healing properties, and Jesus spots a man who can't walk and can't get himself to the waters in the time when they can heal miraculously
 - 2. The area is crowded with people, but the man is alone
 - 3. Maybe that's why Jesus goes up to him and then asks if he wants to be made well
 - 4. There is no sign of belief from the man healed, that I can tell, although when Jesus tells him to get up and walk, he obeys and is in fact healed
 - d. Notice where there is and isn't mention of community in the narrative
 - i. The young boy had a support system, a family, an advocate
 - ii. The older man was isolated and even when he is healed, those who saw him walking had only criticism to levy against him, not any support
 - 1. And the criticism was because the healing of the man who couldn't walk had taken place on the Sabbath, the day of rest.
 - 2. This, of course, infuriated the religious authorities, and even more when Jesus basically says that he and God were still "working" on the day off (religious folk would have understood signs that God was "working" by seeing children born, plants grow, and sunrises happen)
 - iii. The community around the healing pool, even around the temple, seems self-absorbed, disconnected from each other, even though that's not the way God had meant for that community of believers of be, with laws to provide for the poor, the widows, the orphans, the destitute.
 - iv. In these linked stories, it's the pagan oppressors who show what community is like, while the religious pounce on infractions instead of jumping to lend a hand
3. Reading these healing stories, our attention is drawn to the community, to the context in which the healing happens
- a. It is so good to see all the very competent and compassionate medical professionals in our congregation
 - i. We have nurses and doctors, psychologists and nurse practitioners, hospital maintenance staff and nursing home staff, and more
 - b. But that calling may not be for all of us.

- c. Following Jesus' example today isn't about performing the same healing miracles so much as it is about being the community which nurtures people looking for healing
- d. My sister Delia found her calling maybe not in healing as a doctor, but in being the companion and constant caregiver as the one daughter who as an adult moved in with our mom and dad in their vulnerable later years. Her presence was part of their healing community.
- e. You and I play the role of supportive community, which is part of the healing story of so many here.
 - i. That role involves being willing to sit with / be with / advocate for those who are seeking healing, which may be healing of the body, or of relationships (and, let's face it, that will be us at one point or another)
 - ii. So I'm grateful for the community of healers and care-givers who surround us, the compassionate listeners, the praying faithful, the card-writers, the outside-the-box thinkers, the casserole-makers and servers, the Sweet Dreams bed-deliverers, the wood-choppers and haulers, and so many more.
- 4. It is a holy calling to be community for those who are feeling broken, who are seeking healing. It is also a holy calling to let ourselves be lifted in care when we are the ones feeling broken in need of healing. We may not all get to be doctors or nurses, but channeling God's love, we can all be healers.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/healing-stories/commentary-on-john-446-54-2>

Wisdom Commentary. John 1-10. Mary L. Coloe. Series editor Barbara E. Reid. OP. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press. 2021. P.131-147.

Reflection questions

1. Please share a story of healing (physical, emotional, etc.) in your life.
2. The two stories of healing in John 4:46-54, 5:1-18 are quite different. What do you think the gospel writer wanted us to have as takeaways from each?
3. What role have you seen community play in stories of healing in your life?