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Proper 16C
Peace, Seattle
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Luke 13:10-17

HEAVY SONG/HEALING

In the tradition of the tribal peoples with whom I once served—the Karuk, Yurok, Hupa and Tolowa—there is a Sacred Dance called, in English, the Brush Dance. Over the course of four days and nights, the gathered community dances, sings, and prays for the healing of one who is ill.

Each evening at dusk, after the medicine fire has been kindled, men and women, clothed in special regalia, take their places within the cedar-planked perimeter of the Dance pit, and the lead Singer intones the ceremony's first song: a "Heavy Song."

It's hard to describe what a Heavy Song is; you really have to experience it. But you can feel the weight of it—it's gravity—pulling the hearts and minds and bodies and spirits of the community, like strands of a rope, and weaving them together into a sacred whole.

The Heavy Songs, and other songs that are sung during the ceremony, have been passed down from generation to generation over the course of centuries, and so, like some of the oldest and most revered hymns of our own tradition, these songs take on the accumulated hopes and sorrows, longings and prayers of the community through time. And in the process they become living things and a powerful, grounding presence.

The Heavy Song summons and focuses the community's attention, reminding them of their spiritual vocation. When it's done well, you can feel the weight of the Heavy Song pulling everyone's mind into a kind of spiritual alignment.

In addition to all these aspects, there's also an element of deep lament to the strains of the Heavy Song.

Why am I talking about the Heavy song this morning?

When I learned, upon our return home, of the severe hand burn suffered by young Noah; and of Grace's fractured hip and hospitalization, and finally of Ken's new, life threatening diagnosis, my heart began to sing a Heavy Song.

When people we love and care about are suffering and in need of healing, it is our vocation as sisters and brothers in Christ to share in their pain, looking for ways to be present to them.

Sometimes the physical or emotional pain they experience is so palpable that it overwhelms us – and we may find ourselves tempted to turn away. But the deep resources of our faith call us back, because among us, accompanying us, is the crucified and risen One who has shown us how we can be with one another, tend to one another, love and care for each other without fear.

So we open up the Scripture today, and lo and behold, here's Jesus once again showing himself to be the great Healer, this time transforming the life of a woman who had been victimized for eighteen long years.

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When Jesus sees her come through the door of the synagogue where he's teaching, he notices her immediately. That posture of hers—being bent nearly in half—catches his attention.

It's worth noting how Luke describes her. He says:
JUST THEN THERE APPEARED A WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT THAT HAD CRIPPLED HER FOR 18 YEARS.
***NOT*:** "A WOMAN WHO WAS CRIPPLED FOR 18 YEARS,
***BUT*:** "A WOMAN *WITH A SPIRIT* THAT HAD CRIPPLED HER FOR 18 YEARS."

See the difference? What Luke is saying is that there's more to this woman's story than a physical condition. There's another dimension, other forces at work, not immediately apparent, that have caused her condition.

Not waiting for her to approach him, Jesus calls her over, pronounces her free, lays his hands on her, and for the first time in 18 years instead of staring at feet she is lifting her chin and looking at the faces of the people in her community, standing upright in the presence of God and her community—a whole person! WOW.

The Heavy Song has moved on to become a song of praise.

Now, there is, it seems, a risk that always accompanies the prayers we utter—whether for ourselves or on behalf of others.

What if he, what if she, what if I don't receive the healing I long for?
Sometimes it seems too risky to ask.

But here's the truth: healing is always God's will for us in Jesus Christ.
Healing is the reason that God in Christ emptied himself and became obedient even to death on the cross. (Phil. 2) God's will for us and for all this sacred world is healing! That's where it's all headed! That's the resurrection story! That's our future.

But here's the catch: The healing God offers now may not come in the form we would like. We may not see the healing we long for in the form we long for it, in the life of those we love.

But we are invited to pray for healing nevertheless. It is our sacred calling as God's people; to sing the Heavy Song for Ken and Grace and Noah, and the others who are on our intercession list…to entrust them to God and to trust God with the outcome.

Sisters and Brothers, whether the issue for you is a physical one or a relational one; whether it's a problem you can't shake, a habit you can't kick, or a deep wound that keeps you unable to lift your head, Jesus wants you to know today that he is here for you.

And he calls us to be here for each other.
It's the most sacred gift we can give to each other. And it comes from him.

Amen.