St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven
June 7, 2026

It's interesting how someone can make a quick throwaway comment, not meaning much by it, but if it hits just at the right moment it can change everything. Many years ago I moved to a quiet spot in the Northwest Corner that was basically in a state park and where I got almost no radio signal. I've always loved listening to the radio and a friend of mine knew that, and so he bought me a beautiful and quite impressive *internet* radio. This radio would theoretically get me stations from all over the world. I was happy to be given such a wonderful gift but when I read the instructions they intimidated me, quite honestly, and so I basically left it in the box. . on a shelf. . figuring that someday I'd have time to take it somewhere and get some help. One day my friend Robert came by and it caught his eye. "What's this?" he asked. "Oh it's quite amazing," I said; "It's an internet radio. It works using streaming rather than radio waves." With the perfect look and delivery, Robert responded. "It will work even better if you take it out of the box."

And yes it was just a throwaway line, a little fun, sarcastic repartee, but it really landed. I was aware in some way that I had boxes I was leaving unopened, perhaps in my professional life and personal life but absolutely in my spiritual life. All was fine outwardly: I was getting myself to the Eucharist at least weekly, taking on service projects, spending time in prayer, doing lots of reading. But I knew I hadn't quite opened the box all the way and that maybe, as with the radio, I saw it as something for "down the road" when I had the time and perhaps, again like the radio, I saw it as something that felt a bit intimidating. Diving deep, opening oneself up, taking the full plunge. Not quite yet, at least.

And so in the few minutes I have this morning, I just want to suggest that this beautiful gospel passage is all about "taking it out of the box" and that in fact the Gospel of Matthew is all about taking it out of the box from his first word to his very last. Matthew beckons, he encourages, he invites, he urges; he recruits: He says "Please open this up." He desperately wants to invite us to *take it out the box* so much so that he was willing to take the enormous risk and take on the incalculable expense of crafting this gospel, a formidable task indeed in his place and time. This is why Matthew wrote. He wrote to build, to build up, to inspire, and frankly, to recruit. If Luke is the inspirational gospel and if John is the mystical gospel and if Mark is the irresistible gospel, Matthew is the evangelical gospel, plain and simple. They're all called "evangelists" but Matthew is the one who's trying in every word to evangelize you. He wants you to decide for Christ, to be all in; he wants to build a church, a mission, a movement; he wants to take it to the ends of the earth; he wants to transform and transfigure the world; and he wants you — us — to be part of all of that transformation and transfiguring and building and taking and experiencing and knowing. He wants us to take it out of the box.

And in this radiant gospel passage, we see him doing this in two ways.

First, like any good evangelist, he wants us to feel something right down to our toes, to see and feel just how beautiful all of this is, how hearbreakingly wonderful Jesus is. He wants this feeling to take over us. And so he ladles out story upon wondrous story, image upon radiant image. How can you not be moved by these vignettes, each so filled with grace and beauty and mercy and a heartbeat of pure love. It starts as Jesus is simply walking along and sees a man at a tax booth.

Who is this man at the tax booth? He's a tax man which means in the ancient world he's a man who does bad things, quite honestly, who exploits neighbors for his own gain, who cozies up to corrupt leaders, who no one likes and probably doesn't like much about himself either. So what does Jesus do? He walks right up to him and says "I need you. Join me." Matthew gets up and does precisely that and then, in an unlikely twist that I love, follows Jesus to dinner with who else but. . .a whole bunch of other tax collectors and others struggling. That's who Jesus calls as his first followers. And of course folks find it odd, and he answers them. "I'm here to bring mercy," he says, so poignantly; "I'm here to call and raise up and bring new light and life to the broken and the brokenhearted, the fallen, the foolish, the forgotten. I've come to call not the perfect but the flawed, the fragile."

Healings follow and mercy flows through these healings palpably. We can't help but feel it. That's Matthew's art and it's what evangelists do so well: invite us to see and hear and taste and feel. A man Jesus might well consider his opponent asks for help. Opponent? It doesn't matter. Jesus has come for mercy and he offers it. A woman dares to cross a considerable boundary, touching one she should not touch, and she asks for help. A social boundary? A ritual boundary? It doesn't matter. Jesus has come for mercy and he offers it without hesitating. Matthew is an evangelical, a sharer of the gospel, and he longs for us to have and to know and to savor these stories, for them to fill us with divine fire and love.

And then second and finally he wants to make another evangelical move. He wants to invite us, heart, body and soul, to jump in, to rise up, to commit, to go deep, to take it out of the box. And here's what I want to suggest is really the heartbeat of this gospel passage, this beautiful mix of vignettes. He offers them because he wants us to see ourselves fully in them. Because he knows that we *are* in them. That we like the tax man aren't sure we're worthy of that special place right up next to him, right at his side at dinner, on the road with him, but he wants to give it to us. We know this right from the beginning of this evangelical gospel. The ones who God chose to make redemption real and through whom God brought salvation to the world are folks like Rahab and Tamar, folks with enormous struggles and challenges, folks like us. It's Ruth, David, Solomon, and Bathsheba, and the message is clear. It's us. He needs *us*.

And finally yes, and this might be the hardest for us, he intends to heal us too. He'll cross any line just as he did with the leader of the synagogue, and he welcomes us to cross any line, just as she did, the hero of this passage and one of the most luminous persons of faith in scripture. She feels it, she knows it, nothing is going to stop her from touching the one whose touch can raise from the dead, whose gaze and whose word and whose presence give life and make whole. Nothing will stop her and, Matthew urges, nothing need stop *us either*. To open the box, to take it out of the box is to offer ourselves for healing, full stop. And it's to offer ourselves to all the vulnerability and doubt and the no small measure of fear that that healing will necessitate. That's Matthew's pulsating, beating, irresistible heart and it beats and pulsates for us all. Join me, it says, please join me, I need you. Rise up, rise all the way up from wherever you are. I need you. Follow me and find yourself. Follow me and find the God who loved you into being. Follow me and find home, your one true home, and then go out and invite all the others waiting for a word of hope, of redemption, of mercy, of peace, of love to join you there. "O for a thousand tongues," the hymn so memorably proclaims "to sing my dear Redeemer's praise." You have them, Matthew says. All of them. You have everything you need. You just need to take it out of the box.