St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven CT
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I've always loved the music of Haydn and I've tended to carry his piano music with me wherever I go. His sonatas are usually open on my music rack or nearby. And so one day this summer I had an idea. He wrote 52 sonatas and there are 52 weeks in the year. So I thought I'd go ahead and learn one a week. It's been fun and, among other things, I've been discovering that the standard, old-fashioned wisdom about Haydn tends to be true. As commentators have noted over the years, each of his pieces is different yet a similar energy does noticeably run through all of them. To try to put it in words, his music always seems to move forward. It's filled with momentum. invention, surprise. It's light-filled, graceful and balanced. And it seems somehow to defy gravity, always lifting off, always ascending. And this tends to be true whether it's in a major key or a minor key, and no matter the color, mood or atmosphere. Here are two of his piano pieces that are very different, but which definitely share this energy in common. [play a few bars]

One major, one minor; one sunny, one rhapsodic; but both always moving forward and upward. No one can figure out how Haydn does this. It's his own unique magic. But we do have thoughts about *why* he does it, and there tend to be two. The first is situational. Haydn spent most of his working life in a palace, where he had a large apartment and an orchestra in residence. In his own words, "I had to be inventive." His audiences were the Esterhazy princes that he worked for, and their guests, visiting royalty and aristocrats. And so his music sparkles as something should that's meant for entertainment after dinner. But there's another reason for this energy that tells us more. Haydn's legacy lies in the unique and striking ways his music captured a critical moment in human history. It was a moment filled with optimism, of momentum and hope in the power of reason, invention, discovery. And so his music is shot through with precisely those qualities, that inventiveness, ingenuity, momentum, balance and reason.

My friends, it's a Matthew year. We get Matthew for 52 weeks every three years and we're getting near the end of the cycle. We started last November and we've now been steeped in *his* recurring themes, the lines and the energies that run through *him*. And, as with Haydn, they've been right there for all to see for all 52 weeks, just as commentators over the centuries have noted. Matthew, as it turns out, has focused his attention on power: on the use of power, the misuse of power, the abuse of power. That theme has coursed through his own retelling of the gospel story. We see it today in this story of power and how power can be employed in acts of enormous generosity. We saw it last week in stories of power and how power can be used to forgive and heal just as it can be used, sadly, to hurt and destroy. If you were here for Nathan Peace's excellent sermon a few weeks ago, we saw it in a story of *group* power, the power of "us" together in a reflection on how we might use that power for good. We don't always. Matthew wants us to see how indeed we can. Power, as it turns out, will also conclude Matthew's gospel as Jesus uniquely in Matthew will hand power over to the disciples in Matthew's closing scene. And of course power so memorably began Matthew as King Herod uniquely in Matthew schemed and fumed, plotting to use power to kill and destroy out of paranoia as three kings shared and even shed *their* power out of faith and devotion and love in a remarkable journey over moor and mountain.

Once again, we find ourselves naturally asking the question. Why does Matthew return so often to *power* as a primary theme and energy? Why does he spend so much time showing how power

can both restore and divide? Both heal and hurt? Once again, we find two answers. And the first again is situational. It's also pretty simple and it's quite sad. Abuse of power was rampant in Matthew's time. It's hard to overstate the degree to which one could be hurt, crushed, really in Roman-occupied Palestine by a state that "kept the peace" through breathtaking brutality. Opposition was instantly stifled and the penalty was death. It's the penalty Rome only hesitated briefly to apply when Jesus was brought before them, accused of insurrection. He had been proclaimed "king" by just too many in a realm where there could only be one king, and that king was Caesar. Stories of emperors and their routine abuses of power are frankly too gruesome to share out loud. Hollywood films have if anything understated routine horror that, while real, seems impossible, too awful to be true. Matthew wrote most likely in the wake of such an awful moment indeed, the destruction of the temple, the holiest of places, a place of hope and security and identity. This use of power was an act of ultimate devastation in the lives of the Jewish folks to whom Matthew writes.

All true, and yet while all of this is indeed in the air, there's another reason Matthew focuses so consistently on power, and it's where I'd like to wind up today. Because while Matthew's focus on power is situational, it's also deeply and wonderfully *invitational*. All of this is an invitation from a gospel writer willing to risk everything to compile and compose it, to spread and share it, to shout it from any and every rooftop. *You don't have to live like this*, Matthew preaches himself raw hoping to persuade us. You are invited now and always, he urges us, into another realm, another place, another kingdom, a kingdom where power never hurts but always heals. A kingdom where power extends outward, always, in generosity and love, never inward in jealousy and fear.

And so today we hear this beautiful story of the one whose idea of what's right and fitting, whose sense of justice extends so far beyond our own that at first we might even find ourselves baffled as a landowner pays workers the same amount for one hour of labor that others are getting for nine hours. Seems unfair at first. Shouldn't the ones who worked longer get more? Surely they're right to grumble. But Jesus's point here isn't just about an any old landowner or land. It's about God and God's kingdom and God's lavish, unconditionally generous invitation to life and flourishing in precisely that kingdom. When did *we each* say "yes" to this most wondrous invitation? When exactly did *we* each hear God graciously beckon us to our one true home, and when exactly did we say "I'll be right there?" Some were earlier, some were later, some haven't said yes quite yet. Just as in every other page and every other word of his gospel, Matthew wants us to see and hear God's invitation and know that it's issued to us all and to us each, now and always. In every one of these 52 weeks with Matthew we hear God's invitation home to the peaceable kingdom where power extends ever outward, where God's unlikely justice heals and restores.

And so, finally, what about us today? We're all too well aware that we live in a time when power is misused, when opposition is silenced, when generosity can seem awfully hard to find. What's our response? What's our call in a moment such as this? Matthew doesn't end his gospel in despair. He doesn't end it in the devastation that could have defined or even paralyzed his community. He ends it instead as power is *handed over to us*. Go, his gospel says. Be generous. Give to all who ask. Be peacemakers. Love those who are hardest to love. Live the life shown to you by the one who loved you into being, the one who gave up all power to live among us, to know hurt and joy as we do. Live the kingdom life *now* made real for us by the one who restores all in all. Don't wait! Live it now. It's not easy, Matthew says, so know that we can live it only in the walk that is fueled and

sustained and renewed eternally by the one who *yielded all power*, gave all of it up, so that we might truly live. Thanks be to God. Amen.