

A NOTE TO PARENTS

“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”
Matthew 9:13

God’s Word calls on us to be “righteous”—just, upright, faithful, decent, trustworthy—yet often the zealous pursuit of righteousness leads to high-minded scorn of those who are not righteous, so that the righteous undercut their own righteousness by becoming proud, elitist, and separatist. Ultimately, righteousness itself becomes distorted into some form of visible respectability that society fixes on as a stand-in for the real thing. Now the righteous are no longer righteous, but *self-righteous*, investing far more energy in increasingly meaningless social or religious rituals than in knowing and obeying the living God.

In every generation, prophets call on the *self-righteous* to turn back to true *righteousness*: justice, mercy and love. It takes courage to utter this call. Prophets create scandal by upsetting the status quo and threatening vested interests. Jesus, of course, is squarely in this prophetic tradition. But Jesus goes further. He creates scandal upon scandal, by applying the words of the prophet, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” to a situation where there is not only no outward respectability but also no inward integrity. A tax collector is no victim of mere snobbery or discrimination. He is a liar, a cheat, a predator, a collaborator, a bully. Associating with Matthew, Jesus really is treading on thin ice. It’s as if, having already alienated the rich and powerful by backing a low-income housing project in their community, he were now to offend the residents of the project by making friends with the drug lords and loan sharks who prey on the poor.

Jesus is not a sentimental liberal, trying to persuade us that Matthew is really a victim, a nice guy who has just been misunderstood. Only the One who is himself our Righteousness can have the courage and integrity to call Matthew what he is—and to invite him to find amazing grace. Has your child added someone to the picture on the reverse of this page? If so, who is it? Someone your child loves and cares about ... or someone he or she hates or fears? Talk with your child about who needs Jesus’ love, and why.

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Year A
PROPER 5
TRACKS 1 and 2

There was a tax collector
named Matthew.
MATTHEW 9:9



MATTHEW GOT RICH BY CHEATING THE PEOPLE.

One day, Jesus looked in the door of the tax office.



He said, "Matthew! Come and follow me!"



Matthew couldn't believe Jesus wanted someone like him.



He dropped what he was doing, and went with Jesus!



Some people said that Jesus should not go near people like Matthew, who did bad things like cheating people, and working for the cruel Roman government. But Jesus said, "These are the ones who really need God's love!"



Who can you think of who needs God's love?
Add them to the picture.