

All Saints Day (Year A)

What is it like to live as God's saint? This week's readings affirm that all who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. God's saints today – including all who are baptized into Christ – are called to look ahead, to know the hope to which God calls. And God's saints are called to live now in the presence of God's promises, working toward their fulfillment.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

This passage begins the first of Jesus' five major sections of teaching in Matthew. Matthew 5 is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, which might be thought of as Jesus' vision of life in God's reign. The Sermon on the Mount concludes with Matthew 7:28. The setting is on a mountain, where Jesus is seated and teaching the disciples. Noting Matthew 7:28, however, one can imagine the crowds mentioned in verse 1 craning their necks to overhear Jesus' words.

In Matthew, the gospel writer sets up comparisons between Jesus and Moses. Moses encountered God on a mountain and received God's Law to give to the Hebrew people. In these verses, Jesus speaks from the mountain to teach about God's reign.

Verses 3–12 are called "The Beatitudes," pronouncements of blessings. What Jesus says about those who are blessed by God likely surprised and shocked those who heard it. Jesus teaches that God's blessings come to those who are ignored by society, those who are viewed as outcasts, and those who are willing to work for what God values. Verses 3–6 speak of the relationship between believers and God; verses 7–12 speak of the relationship between believers and the world.

Jesus teaches that poverty of spirit, meekness, longing for God's righteousness, showing mercy, relying on God, and working for peace may come into the lives of believers. Jesus speaks a word of promise into such situations: the favour of God's reign means comfort, inheritance, fulfillment, mercy, and eternal relationship with God. The Beatitudes close with Jesus' encouragement to his followers to rejoice. Others may verbally or physically abuse and persecute them for living lives of faithful service to God and neighbour, but God has the ultimate power.

Jesus' words call us and all the saints to gaze forward to the time when God's promises will be fulfilled. Those who weep now will laugh. Those who are hungry now will be filled. Those who are poor now will receive the riches of God's inheritance. With this future firmly in our gaze, the obstacles to faith become smaller, the path easier to navigate.

The writer of **1 John 3:1–3** proclaims that it is God's love that makes one a child of God, and calls on the readers of this letter – then and now – to claim this identity with hope and faith.

Written to encourage Christians facing persecution in the Roman Empire late in the first century CE, the book of Revelation is a vision of the ultimate fulfillment of God's reign. **Revelation 7:9–17** is the writer's vision of multitudes from every nation – including those who have suffered in their faith – coming to live in God's reign. God's gift of salvation to all peoples is received by God's people with endless, wondrous worship.

Psalm 34:1–10, 22 is part of a wisdom teaching about God's goodness. There is no direct address to God, rather the psalmist calls for all to "taste and see" that God is good. God delivers; God saves; God redeems the lives of God's faithful saints.

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All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for the blessings God has given us to share with others. When we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. We have a role to play, along with the saints of old, in the story of God's saving work. What might we do, as individuals and as the church, to welcome all people to live in God's promise?



Focus Scripture
Matthew 5:1–12

Additional Scriptures
Revelation 7:9–17
Psalm 34:1–10, 22
1 John 3:1–3

Eternal God, you know our yesterdays, our todays, and our tomorrows. Thank you for working in the lives of all your saints. Give us faith to engage the world according to your ways, living in hope and confidence of your saving love. Amen.

The Focus for Adults

Bless you!" "Well, bless my soul!" "I feel so blessed." "He's been a real blessing to us." "God bless our native land." "God bless us, everyone." Adults likely have spoken these words or ones like them. Most adults reflect from time to time on what seem to be the "blessings" in their lives. Some may find it difficult to believe they are blessed when they are facing challenging economic or relationship situations. Most adults will say they have felt blessed at some time in their lives; they also are likely to recognize those times they have been in the position to bless others. However, it might not be as easy for adults to define *bless* or *blessing*. Just what are

we doing when we bless someone or ask for God's blessing? Just what does it mean to be blessed by God? How would you explain the concept of blessing?

Today is All Saints Day, a day when our gaze is pulled forward, to the time when God's blessings and promises to all who believe will be fulfilled. A saint is one who has been chosen, or blessed, for the work of God, and this includes all those baptized into Christ. This may be a new understanding for some in the group. Pray for group members, yourself included, that all may grow in understanding of what it means to live as a blessed saint in God's reign.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures – Revelation 7:9–17; Psalm 34:1–10, 22; 1 John 3:1–3; Matthew 5:1–12 – and biblical background material page for this session.
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.

Gather

- ❑ Prepare the worship space with *white fabric* and a *candle*. Bring *matches* or a *lighter*.
- ❑ Bring *tealights*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of the biblical background material* for this session.
- ❑ Bring *several Bible versions*.
- ❑ Bring *pens or pencils*.
- ❑ Bring *newsprint and markers*.
- ❑ Bring *copies of "Matthew 5:1–12" and "To Bless,"* the resource sheets for this session.

Respond

- ❑ **Art reflection:** a *Seasons of the Spirit poster* that suggests theme of hope or looking to the future
- ❑ **All Saints Day cards:** *blank greeting cards or drawing paper, envelopes, markers in a variety of colours, names of people in your church preparing for Confirmation (Affirmation of Baptism)*
- ❑ **Bless litany:** *copies of "To Bless" resource sheet*

Bless

- ❑ Bring a *clear bowl with water* in it.



All Saints Day (Year A)

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To celebrate the eternal blessings of God’s reign.

Gather

Greet group members by name as they arrive.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Note that on All Saints Day we honour the saints who have gone before us and also anticipate our own lives in Christ’s eternal presence. Invite group members to name past saints who are on their minds today, lighting a tealight for each one and placing it in the worship space.

Pray Form two groups and read **Psalm 34:1–8** as an opening prayer, alternating verses between groups.

Sing a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources or from the hymnal or songbook used by your church.

Moving into the theme

Ask group members to think back on their week, recalling one moment when they felt “blessed.” Allow time to share stories, then discuss:

- **How would you describe the feeling of being blessed?**

Engage

Set the context

Distribute copies of the biblical background material for this session. Set the scene by reading aloud the first two paragraphs of the “Focus Scripture” section. It may help group members to scan the headings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:28) in their Bibles to get a sense of what Jesus is teaching in this section.

Explore the texts

Distribute copies of “Matthew 5:1–12” resource sheet. Ask group members to circle words that suggest the key point of each verse as they listen to a volunteer read the verses aloud. Form pairs to compile a list of the key words on newsprint and display them. Discuss:

- **What seems to be the thrust or intent of this passage?**
- **What is Jesus teaching about the life of discipleship?**
- **Why do you think Jesus uses the future tense (for they will...) in speaking of blessings or rewards?**
- **What contrasts strike you in these verses? What seems to contradict the prevailing attitudes of contemporary culture?**

Compare the wording of the Beatitudes in several Bible versions. How is the phrase “Blessed are...” translated? Next, distribute copies of “To Bless” resource sheet and look at the synonyms for bless around the outside of the sheet. Form pairs to read **Matthew 5:3–11**, substituting other words for *blessed*. As a group, discuss:

- **Which of these synonyms opens a new window of understanding into Jesus’ teaching for you?**
- **According to Jesus, in what ways are the meek blessed? Those who mourn? Those who are merciful? Those who suffer for their faith? Does this make sense to you? Why or why not?**
- **When do you think the blessings that Jesus teaches about will be present fully?**

Like many of Jesus’ teachings, **Matthew 5:1–12** addresses what it means to live both in and toward the reign of God.

- **The passage mentions the “kingdom of heaven.” What do you learn about this reign of God from Jesus’ words?**

In **Revelation 7:9–17**, we encounter John’s vision of the heavenly throne. Form pairs to read this text and report on what promise is made to the ones “robed in white.”

■ What would you say about God and the nature of God’s reign based on this passage?

The writer of 1 John 3:1–3 proclaims we are God’s children. In unison, read these verses aloud.

■ What is the hope of God’s children?

Make life connections

This week’s readings affirm that all who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. The

saints are invited to live in the presence of God’s promises and work toward their fulfillment.

■ If you were writing guidelines for how to live as God’s saints, what would you include from the readings for this session?

Respond

Choose one or two of the following options:

- **Art reflection** Those who trust in God and live faithful lives are blessed, declares Jesus. Allow a quiet moment to view the *Seasons of the Spirit* poster you have selected. Read this guided meditation, pausing at ... for reflection: Imagine you are standing in this image. Where would you be? ... What lies behind you? ... What are you glad to be able to leave behind? ... What is your prayer as you reflect on what has come before? ... What do you imagine is ahead? ... What are you looking forward to? ... What is your prayer as move into the future? After a quiet moment, invite reactions to this reflection.
- **All Saints Day cards** In Baptism, individuals join the communion of saints who live in the presence of Christ. In many churches, Confirmation (Affirmation of Baptism) is a ritual to affirm God’s claim on their lives. What words from the readings today would you like to share with those preparing for confirmation? Create All Saints Day cards for each person preparing for Confirmation (Affirmation of Baptism) in your church, celebrating that you are saints together in God’s reign, and encouraging them in their faith journeys.
- **Bless litany** All Saints Day is a time to celebrate God’s blessings and promises. As a group, on newsprint write a litany of thanks for the blessings you receive as God’s saints. You may want to refer to the verses and words on the “To Bless” resource sheet for ideas. Create a common response line for the petitions of thanksgiving you write. Write the litany on newsprint to use in Bless. You also may want to offer it to the worship leaders in your church.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and sing “Without Seeing You” or a hymn about trusting in God from the hymnal or songbook your church uses. Comment that All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for the blessings God has given us to share with others. Invite group members to name saints – renowned or known only to them – who have blessed them. What has been learned from these saints of God?

Ask participants to place a few fingers in the bowl of water as you pray the Bless Litany written during Respond or the prayer from the biblical background material. As members depart, have them touch their wet fingertips to the hand or forehead of a neighbour – perhaps making the sign of the cross – as they say, “You are blessed by God to be a blessing.”

Reflect

In what ways could you sense group members are expanding their understanding of what it means to be a saint, blessed by God? Take time this week

to express thanks to the saints who have been important in your life.



Matthew 5:1-12 (NRSV)

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹²“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”



To Bless

pronounce as holy

glorify

endow

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (*Genesis 2:3*)

...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (*Genesis 12:3b*)

...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live...

(*Deuteronomy 30:19*)

They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of their salvation. (*Psalms 24:5*)

Let the little children come to me...and [Jesus] took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (*Mark 10:14, 16*)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

(*Romans 12:14*)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...

(*Ephesians 1:3*)

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. (*1 Peter 4:15*)

consecrate for religious service

make happy

make a sign of blessing over

guard or protect from

favour

give good fortune to

praise