

## Biblical Background • All Saints Day – Year A



### 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.

# 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: **Mathew 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.



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?



## Reflecting on the Word

### Connecting with life

Think back on your week, recalling one moment when you felt “blessed.”

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

### Scripture

**Matthew 5:1–12** On the paper copy of Matthew 5:1–12 circle words that suggest, to you, the key points of each verse.

- **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?

Read the passage again, substituting all other words for blessed.

- **Which of these synonyms open 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 fully present?**

**Materials** copies of Matthew 5:1–12, several Bible versions

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?**

**Revelation 7:9–17** describes John’s vision of the heavenly throne.

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

**1 John 3:1–3** offers another picture of the saints of God.

- **How has Jesus been revealed to you in the gospels and through the ongoing work of the Spirit?**
- **How would you like to be more Christ-like?**
- **What is the hope of God’s children?**

### Connecting scripture and life

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?**
- **In what ways is your community a reflection of the blessed community? In what ways do you need to grow?**

## Focus for Worship, Learning, and Serving

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.” Those who gather on All Saints Day are likely to 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 unfortunate economic or relationship situations. People of all ages 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 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?

November 1 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. What opportunities are their for you and you faith community to grow in understanding of what it means to live as a blessed saint in God’s reign?



# All Saints Day (Year A)

## Prepare

**NOTE:** All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- ❑ Recruit volunteers needed for worship.
- ❑ Choose an option for hearing Matthew 5:1–12. For the Bible story, invite a storyteller to present the story “Teaching on the Mountain” on p. 6. For the scripture in dialogue arrange for 2 readers.
- ❑ For the gathering time, bring a table; mural paper; blue, green, red, and yellow coloured construction paper; scissors.
- ❑ Prepare the *slide show* for remembering the saints as described in Respond.
- ❑ Choose and set stations as described on pp. 7–8.



## Music Suggestions

### Come, Let Us Seek Our God's Protection

Tom Colvin; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 6*

### Roll Over the Ocean

Traditional; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 6*

### As We Go Now

Stephen Fischbacher; *Seasons Songbook, vol. 6*

### You Are Salt for the Earth, O People

Marty Haugen

### To Know You More

Joe Horness

### Together We Serve

Daniel Charles Damon

## Gather

Cover a small table with a green cloth near the entrance to the worship space. Provide blue, green, red, and yellow construction paper, scissors, and tape. Invite people to cut out a silhouette of themselves dancing and tape to the mural paper before entering the worship space. Play festive music.

### Call to worship

See what great love has been give to us,  
that we should be called children of God.

Come, let us be in the presence of this sacred love.

*(Light the Christ candle, bring in and display the mural of dancing saints from the gathering.)*

### Opening prayer

**ONE:** In all our weakness and strength,  
with our youth-filled spirits and aging bodies,

**ALL:** we come to be your people, O God.

**ONE:** Strong in faith and eager with questions,  
singing our praise and whispering our prayers,

**ALL:** we come to be your people, O God.

**ONE:** Filled with saintly determination  
yet mindful of our human limitations,

**ALL:** we come to be your people, O God.

**ONE:** Made strong in your endless love for us,  
we know ourselves to be yours and

**ALL:** we come to be your people, O God.

**ONE:** May we truly become your people today. Amen.

### Prayer of confession (inspired by 1 John 3:1–3)

**ONE:** Beloved, we are God's children now,  
but what we will be in the fullness of our time  
has not been revealed.

What we do know is this:

we will be like Jesus the Christ and saints of God.

Let us consider how Jesus was revealed among us  
and pray to be more like the Christ in every way.



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## Worship Outline • All Saints Day – Year A

*(Offer the reflections below or use some of your own.*

*Follow each statement with a moment of silence.)*

Jesus embodied the unconditional love of God...

We pray,

**ALL: may we be more like Jesus.**

**ONE:** Jesus fed those who were hungry...

We pray,

**ALL: may we be more like Jesus.**

**ONE:** Jesus drew near to the marginalized and excluded...

We pray,

**ALL: may we be more like Jesus.**

**ONE:** Jesus brought healing and wholeness to others...

We pray,

**ALL: may we be more like Jesus.**

**ONE:** Jesus hungered and thirsted for righteousness...

We pray,

**ALL: may we be more like Jesus.**

### Words of affirmation

Beloved, through the love shown to us by Jesus we can be sure that we are God's children now.

The Spirit of Christ is among us in this gathering and the nature of Christ is revealed within us.

We are becoming more and more like Christ each day.

Therefore, let us live joyfully as God's people;

saints and instruments of God's way.

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## Engage

### Opening the word

#### Matthew 5:1–12

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

**Bible story** Invite a storyteller to present the story "Teaching on the Mountain" on page 6.

**Scripture in dialogue** Read 1 John 3:1–2a from the pulpit or lectern and then pause. Have a second reader enter and sit on a stool at the front of the worship space. The second reader recites Matthew 5:3–12 from memory and then exits

the worship space. Continue reading 1 John 3:2b–3. Consider adapting the language of 1 John to make the subject of the pronouns more obvious, especially given the break in the reading.

#### After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

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## Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

### Remembering the saints

Collect a photograph of each person from the congregation who died in the past year. Create a slide show with the photographs using your church's projection program. Type a verse from a psalm or other reading that was used during their memorial service next to the each person's photo. As each slide is projected, state the name of the person and read the verse in the margin. Have someone add a dancing figure to the mural of dancing figures created during the gathering time. Play instrumental music in the background.

### Prayers of the people

**ONE:** We notice the saints around us, O God;

They have time for their friends and their family members.

**ALL: We want to be like them. (silence)**

**ONE:** We notice the saints around us, O God;

They see a neighbour in need, and they are ready to meet that need.

**ALL: We want to be like them. (silence)**

**ONE:** We notice the saints around us, O God; they are aware of an injustice in the local community, or beyond this nation, and they find a way to bring change.

**ALL: We want to be like them. (silence)**

**ONE:** We notice the saints around us, O God; they have a strong faith, and are ready to nourish their faith in Christian community.

**ALL: We want to be like them. (silence)**

*(From Prayers to Share: Responsive Prayers for each Sunday of the Church Year by David Sparks. Copyright © 2004 Wood Lake Publishing.)*



## Prayer of dedication

Faithful God, you ask us to be faithful people.  
In this community, you ask us to be people of justice.  
In this community, you ask us to be people of mercy.  
In this community, you ask us to be people of peace.  
Be with us as we try to be faithful  
in large ways and in small ways  
so your eternal community may come in every way.

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## Bless

*(Based on Revelation 7:12, 16–17)*

**ONE:** Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honour and power  
and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen!

**ALL: We go out to be God's people.**

**ONE:** Go in strength to be the saints of God  
for you will hunger no more, and thirst no more;  
the sun will not strike you, nor any scorching heat.

**ALL: We go out to be God's people.**

**ONE:** Live the way of God with confidence  
for God is your shepherd,  
and will guide you to the spring of life.

**All: We go out to be God's people.**

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## Special Days Commentary

### November 2 – All Souls Day

For those traditions who use All Saints Day to commemorate canonized saints, or those whose lives have been particularly Christ-like, All Souls Day on November 2 provides an opportunity to remember other Christians who have died. A

simple, reflective service can provide an opportunity to invite those who have been bereaved during the year to gather to remember their loved ones in prayer.

# TEACHING ON THE MOUNTAIN

Based on Matthew 5:1–12

Jesus' days were busy. He walked all over Galilee, teaching in synagogues and healing the sick. He taught the good news of God's plan for everyone. People told their friends and crowds of people came when they heard he was heading their way.

When Jesus saw the crowd of people, he went up the mountain. The disciples, Jesus' closest friends, went with him. When they came to a small flat area, Jesus sat down. This was a signal for the others to sit down too because Jesus was going to teach them. The crowd of people was nearby, so they could hear Jesus' words too.

After time to rest, Jesus began to teach the disciples, saying,

"Blessed are people who feel hopeless, for they will again know that God is with them.

Blessed are the people who see the deep hurts in the world, for they will see that God is with them.

Blessed are the people who wait for God's ways to cover the earth, for they will see the greatness of God.

Blessed are the people who look for justice and fairness, for everyone for they will see the mercy of God.

Blessed are the people who show kindness to others, for they will know the forgiveness of God.

Blessed are the people who seek to follow God's way, for they will know themselves to be in the presence of God.

Blessed are the people who work for peace, for they will know that they are children of God.

Blessed are the people who are shamed or punished, for following God's way for they will be with God forever.

Blessed are you when people call you names because you love God. Be full of joy for God will not forget you."



## Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices depending on your space and numbers. Display the directions.

### Wall of saints

**Materials** long strip of mural paper taped to the wall at a height that allows tracing around the head and shoulders of all ages; markers and crayons; a copy of the directions displayed where all can see; if possible, Internet connection and computer/tablet/smartphone; copy of the directions displayed where all can see



### The practice of living as disciples

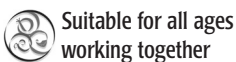
#### Directions

Each of us is blessed by God, and is a saint. Make a visual statement of this by assembling a wall of saints.

1. Work in pairs to trace around the heads and shoulders of each other on the mural paper.
2. Draw in your own features and hair
3. Print your name below your figure.
4. Above or below the figures print, "Saints of God."
5. If possible, go to <http://www.allsaintscompany.org/icons/dancing-saints> to see drawings of saints that have been painted on the wall of Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco.

### Litany

**Materials** copies of "Teaching on the Mountain" on p. 6, paper, pens and pencils, a copy of the directions displayed where all can see



### The practice of prayer

#### Directions

1. Together make a list of people you feel are without hope. Try to name groups of people rather than use names. For example, people whose homes were destroyed.
2. You might use the teachings of Jesus in today's bible story "Teaching on the Mountain" as a basis.
3. Have a volunteer read each line of the litany, with everyone responding after each line "God, bless them."
4. Conclude with "Amen."

## Bookmarks

**Materials** card stock or heavy paper, cut into rectangles, markers, hole punch, ribbon, copy of the directions displayed where all can see

### The practice of encouragement

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#### Directions

Saints are people who help us to follow Jesus' teachings and live in God's way.

1. Select someone you know who is a saint of God.
2. Print that person's name on one side of the bookmark.
3. On the reverse side, print: You are a saint of God.
4. Punch a hole near the top of the bookmark.
5. Put a piece of ribbon through the hole and tie it in place.
6. Deliver or send your bookmark to the person.

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## Finger labyrinth

**Materials** pencils, copies of a finger labyrinth (type "finger labyrinth into your computer search engine, or copy from the *Virtual Resource Booklet* that is in the Library at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca)), copy of the directions displayed where all can see.



Suitable for  
all ages

### The practice of contemplation

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#### Directions

As we try to follow God's way, it is important to take time apart to think about Jesus' teachings. One way we can do this is to walk the path of a labyrinth to meditate and pray. Labyrinths can be found outdoors, but some people also like to use a finger labyrinth.

1. Take a copy of the finger labyrinth.
  2. Find the "entrance" to the labyrinth and, using your finger or pencil, slowly follow the path to the center of the labyrinth.
  3. As you travel the path in, think about the saints in your life.
  4. When you reach the middle, pause and offer a prayer of thanks for that person, and pray for that person.
  5. As you travel out again, think about ways you are living in the way of Jesus.
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