

All Saints Day (Year B)

All who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. As in ages past, God's saints today are called to embrace God's new creation, here and now. In baptism, we become God's new creation – God's saints – and are commissioned to live now in the presence of God's promises, working toward their fulfillment.

Focus Scripture: Revelation 21:1–6a

The beginning of the book of Revelation tells us that it is the record of the visions of John concerning “what must soon take place” (1:1). The term for this kind of revelation is *apocalypse*, meaning “unveiling.” Revelation was likely written around 95 CE. This date, plus the style of language, leads most scholars to say it was not written by the apostle John or the author of the gospel of John. This John was a Christian prophet, speaking a vision of God's word to seven early churches.

A central tenet of Judeo-Christian beliefs is that the universe has been created by God for a purpose; therefore, history has meaning and purpose. According to this belief, history is not an endless cycle where events are destined to repeat themselves, but rather a path with a destination. As the Bible begins with creation in Genesis, so it ends with re-creation in Revelation. There, John speaks of the goal of God's creation – a purpose never fully realized in the history of time and space, but not entirely beyond history, either.

The text speaks of a new Jerusalem “coming down” from heaven, the place of perfection. Jerusalem, the central and most important point in the world for Jews – and at this early stage the church was predominately Jewish in self-understanding – is portrayed as a character in a wedding ceremony. In this new time of living, God will remove death and tears. The time of human pain will have passed.

At the same time, the sea is “no more.” For ancient Jews, the sea was a threatening place and in Revelation it was a place from which the beast had come (13:1). With it gone, there would no longer be any chaotic forces that resist God's sovereign love. There would be “a new heaven and a new earth” – perfect, holy, and in union with God.

This new heaven and new earth are not meant to completely replace the old, for that would mean that human history is ultimately unimportant to God. The vision is one of renewal. Like the flower in the bulb or the oak in the acorn, the new has been present in the old all along.

Another vision of God's ultimate reign is given in **Isaiah 25:6–9**. The prophet describes the time when God will call “all peoples” to a new life on God's holy mountain – a location that suggests the meeting of heaven and earth – where death will be swallowed up forever. On a similar note, the writer of **Wisdom 3:1–9** describes how God watches over the souls of righteous ones forever, in spite of what mortals may perceive. **Psalms 24:4** echoes the refrain of God's glorious reign as home for those “who do not lift up their souls to what is false.”

John 11:32–44 is the account of Jesus journeying to be with Mary and Martha as they grieve the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus weeps with them, yet still offers the promise of new life in God's glory.



It is often said that the past informs the present, but it may be just as true to say the future informs the present. When we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. 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. Visions of renewal, of new covenant, and of all creation singing praises to God – how do these glimpses of God's hope for the new heaven and the new earth inspire us to bring renewal right here, right now?



Focus Scripture
Revelation 21:1–6a

Additional Scriptures
Isaiah 25:6–9 or
Wisdom 3:1–9
Psalms 24
John 11:32–44

Holy God, your wisdom has formed all that has been, that is, and that shall be. Thanks for revealing your glorious ways in Christ and in the lives of all your saints. Strengthen us to live faith-filled lives, with confidence in your eternal love. Amen.

The Focus for Ages 12–14

Young people often have a gift of seeing things in new ways. They are often full of idealism, wanting and willing to vision new ways of being and doing. As they move to more abstract thinking, playing with ideas can sometimes be as much fun for them as playing sports. Today's session invites young people to imagine the "new heaven and new earth" described in the reading from Revelation. Definitions of the verb "to imagine" include "the ability to produce a new whole" or "to be able to deal creatively with reality." Many young people are very good at dealing creatively with their reality. Respect the new insight and vision that the young people in your group bring to today's discussion. Consider ways in which you can help keep the doors of their imaginations open, helping them to always see the possibil-

ities of a "new heaven and earth" even when they are surrounded by the bad news of everyday reality.

The reading from Revelation speaks of hanging on to hope in the face of suffering. Think about the realities facing members of your group. What are some of their concerns? What are the things that they might want "to be made new" in their lives and in the world? What is the hope they need to empower them to participate in the creation of a better world? On this All Saints Day, you can encourage the members of your group to reflect on the ways in which they are part of the community of saints living and working toward renewal and the vision of God's reign. Pray that young people will be affirmed in their hopes as they imagine and participate in the vision of God's new creation.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the scriptures, Psalm 24, Revelation 21:1–6a, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Prepare a worship area with *white cloth*, *white pillar candle*, and *Bible*.
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.
- ❑ Bring *Bibles*, *candlesnuffer*, *matches*, and *CD player*, if possible.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of the resource sheet "The Last Book of the Bible"* (p. 5) and the *top section of the resource sheet "Code Words"* (p. 6).
- ❑ Bring *sheets of paper* and *markers*.

Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Poems:** *copies of section "Diamante poems" on the resource sheet "Code Words," coloured paper, markers*
- ❑ **Mural:** *large sheet mural paper, art supplies*
- ❑ **Thank you cards:** *denominational outreach magazines, church newsletters, information about local community outreach projects, construction paper, coloured paper, art supplies, envelopes, stamps*



All Saints Day (Year B)

Scripture

Revelation 21:1–6a

FOCUS To explore how we are called, as a community of saints, to imagine the possibilities of God’s new creation.

Gather

Welcome the young people and invite them to share some experiences from the past week.

Gather around the worship table and light the candle. Point out the white colour in the worship area, explaining that today we celebrate All Saints Day and remember all of the saints in the history of our church and present today, in whom the presence and love of God shines.

Pray Form two groups to read alternate verses of **Psalm 24** as an opening prayer.

Sing or listen to a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Making connections

Invite young people to think about times when they have imagined having a new life in some way – maybe being given a second chance or a chance to make a fresh start. What would they have liked to leave behind? What would it feel like to make a fresh start? What would be exciting about this? What might be scary or challenging?

Engage

Setting the scene

On All Saints Day we recognize those people who, in the way they lived their lives, have helped others catch and carry the vision of God’s promise of new life. The scripture reading for this day also offers a vision of a whole world made new. This reading comes from the second last chapter of the last book of the Bible. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “The Last Book of the Bible” and invite young people to read the background information.

Moving into the story

Distribute paper and markers. As you read **Revelation 21:1–6a** invite young people to write on their papers some words or images of hope they hear in the reading. When the reading is finished have them fold their papers into airplanes to send around the room to each other; when everyone has received a paper airplane, open them and take turns reading out each other’s words and images.

- **What images or words in this vision stand out the most for you?**
- **Why do you think you noticed these particular words or images?**

Distribute copies of the top section of the resource sheet “Code Words” and invite young people to review these words and their meanings, and then use their Bibles to find these words in **Revelation 21:1–6a**.

- **What words and images does the author use to tell us that things will be different?**
- **What will be different about this new heaven and earth?**

Recall that Revelation was written during a time when Christians were experiencing persecution.

- **What is the hope in this passage, for the early Christians, for us, for the earth?**

Connecting scripture with life

Read **Revelation 21:4** again. Invite group members to reflect on the things that cause suffering and pain in their own lives and in the world. Discuss together the following questions:

- **Where are the places of chaos and suffering in our world today?**
- **What are some of the things that you wish would “pass away and be no more”?**

The vision of John tells us that God is making all things new. Invite young people to talk together about signs of God’s new heaven and new earth that they have seen happening in their community and in the world.

■ **What can this vision from Revelation tell us about how to live as God’s saints?**

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Poems** God’s saints today are called to imagine the possibilities of God’s new creation happening here and now. Distribute the information about “Diamante poems” from the resource sheet “Code Words” and review together the instructions for writing these kinds of poems. Invite young people to follow the structure to create poems that imagine the possibilities of God’s new creation, beginning with things that are in need of renewal and moving to images of God’s new creation (for example, “Polluted” to “Pure”).
- **Mural** The reading from Revelation presents a vision for the renewal of all of creation. Invite youth to imagine how they would illustrate a “new heaven and a new earth.” Have them use the art supplies and work together to create a huge mural illustrating the possibilities of this



new creation. Encourage collaboration and sharing of ideas. As they work, invite young people to discuss ways they might live in and towards the vision of God’s new creation. Display the finished mural in the church hall.

- **Thank you cards** In God’s new creation we are told that pain and suffering will be no more. Review the information about denominational and community outreach programs, noticing the community of saints who help to wipe away the tears of pain and suffering and help all to live in and toward the vision of God’s reign. Invite each person to choose an individual or organization and create a card or letter of thanks for their work. Make arrangements for sending the cards and letters. Consider how the group members might become involved in one of the projects.

Bless

Gather around the worship area. Invite young people to spend a few moments in silence thinking about how they, as part of the community of saints, can live their lives in the light of the possibilities of God’s new creation.

Pray Offer the following prayer, or one of your own.

O God, help us to imagine
the possibilities of your new creation.
Help us to remember that we can be your saints,

living toward the vision of a better world.
Amen.

Sing or listen to a blessing song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Sending out Close the session by offering young people the following blessing, “May God bless you as you go out to participate in helping to build God’s new creation.”

Reflect

What insights did young people express about what it means to be part of the community of saints, working toward the vision of God’s reign?

How might you affirm their hopes as they participate in the vision of God’s new creation?



THE LAST BOOK OF THE BIBLE

The last book in the Bible, *The Revelation to John*, is a complicated book. The writer used a kind of code of symbols, colours, and numbers that had secret meanings. It was written during a time of great danger and persecution and the writer wanted to encourage Christians to be strong and faithful.

Who wrote it?

No one really knows who the author is (but we do know that he wasn't the same person who wrote the gospel of John). John was a common name among Jews and Christians. The author seems to know the Jewish scriptures very well. He might have been a Jewish Christian who was persecuted for his faith and was living in exile on an island called Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor.

When was it written?

Revelation might have been written around the year 95 CE near the end of the reign of the Roman emperor, Domitian. Domitian was the first emperor who tried to make Christians worship the emperor as a god. When they refused they were sometimes punished brutally. The book describes the vision of a final battle between God and the forces of evil (such as the Roman Empire).

Who was it written for?

The first chapter begins with the words "...to the seven churches that are in Asia..." Since the number seven is a symbol for "completeness" it is thought that *Revelation* was written to the whole church, to all Christians living under Roman persecution. The book of *Revelation* was not a prediction of future events, though some people today sometimes use it in that way. But the message of Revelation can still encourage Christians today to be faithful and to work for God's reign.

Apocalyptic writing

The kind of writing used in books like *Revelation* is called "apocalyptic writing." The word "apocalyptic" means to unveil or reveal something hidden. The book of Daniel, in the first part of the Bible, is also in this category. The author of *Revelation* uses images of battle, of dreadful creatures, and of a world dissolving in fire and blood. The message hidden in this vision is a warning that although things will go from bad to worse, God will not desert the world and will create a new heaven and a new earth.



CODE

WORDS

What do those words mean?

The writer of Revelation uses symbolic language and the words often mean more than they seem to at first.

The first earth represented the old world where things like war, sickness, and pollution were present.

The sea was a place of chaotic and evil forces for the ancient Jews.

The city of Jerusalem was the political and religious core or heart of the nation.

The “new Jerusalem” means a new core, the “City of God.”

The “one sitting on the throne” was an image of God.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, so they stand for beginnings and endings.

Diamante poems

The text of a *Diamante poem* forms the shape of a diamond.

