

All Saints Day (Year C)

How do we live out God’s call to sainthood? 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: Luke 6:20–31

Imagine the scene: Jesus goes up a mountain to pray and stays all night. The next morning he calls the disciples together and chooses twelve of them to be apostles (Luke 6:12–16). As they come down the mountain, there is an enormous crowd of people waiting for them, seeking healing. In this group there are other disciples, Jews (those noted as coming from Judea and Jerusalem) and Gentiles (those noted as coming from Tyre and Sidon). Jesus turns to the disciples and says, “Blessed are you...”

In this way the gospel of Luke begins Jesus’ teaching commonly called the Beatitudes. These sayings are also recorded in Matthew 5:1–12. In Luke, this teaching marks the beginning of a period of instruction for the disciples before Jesus sends them out on their own (9:6). As Jesus teaches about the life of discipleship, he turns conventional human understanding upside down.

Luke reports Jesus’ teaching as including four sets of blessings and woes. Poor/rich, hungry/full, weeping/laughing, and rejected/accepted form parallel pairings of blessing and woe. Jesus’ use of the word “you” in each statement suggests that the crowd included individuals living in each of these situations.

As named in Deuteronomy 11:26–28, Jesus’ hearers would have considered blessing to be a sign of God’s favour and woe a sign of God’s disapproval or judgment.

Jesus’ message to those who would follow as disciples is one of astounding promise. Jesus speaks prophetically of the great reversal of human understanding that we encounter in the reign of God. As Jesus continues to teach, his message continues to reveal the surprising ways of God. For many in that crowd, Jesus’ words may have seemed

full of justice and mercy. Others may have heard them as harsh judgment. Some may have wondered, perceiving that following Jesus was not going to be as easy as it may have first seemed.

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.

After giving thanks for the faith of the Ephesians, in **Ephesians 1:11–23** the writer affirms that, through the “seal” of the Holy Spirit, these saints in Ephesus are living in God’s power and protection. The writer shares Paul’s prayer that they will welcome Jesus the Christ as head of the church.

Written to encourage those being persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BCE, **Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18** relates Daniel’s first vision and its interpretation. An angel explains to Daniel that four successive empires (or their rulers) will be destroyed by God and replaced by “the saints of the Most High” – those now suffering under Antiochus.

In **Psalm 149**, the psalmist calls God’s faithful saints to praise God’s saving acts and promises.

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There are blessings and woes in life, and God’s saints are not exempt. Yet, 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 live into God’s promises?



Focus Scripture
Luke 6:20–31

Additional Scriptures
Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11–23

**Almighty God,
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
gift of salvation.
Amen.**

The Focus for Ages 12–14

Young teens often have posters of pop singers, movie stars, bands, or athletes covering the walls of their rooms or decorating covers on school books, journals, or diaries. These heroes or icons become role models, influencing their clothing and hair styles, speech, and values. Some of these individuals do provide positive role models for youth to follow as their own identities emerge. During this session for All Saints Day, young people will be encouraged to think about those who have been their mentors and role models. In particular they can consider those who have encouraged them as they grow in faith and their relationship with God, each other, and the world. Young people can also be encouraged to reflect on the ways in which they too are or can be “saints” in whom God’s love and God’s way is seen.

Jesus’ teachings about blessings and woes can be a challenging one for this age group. While their natural compassion can identify with Jesus’ care and concern for those who are poor, hungry, grieving, and persecuted, the further teachings about woes, and about “loving enemies,” can be tough ones to understand. Some of the members of the group may have had very real experiences of being “cursed” and “abused,” and leaders will need to be aware of this possibility as this part of Jesus’ teaching is explored. A paraphrase is offered on a resource sheet, “Living Generously,” which may help young people understand the meaning of Jesus’ teaching in the context of their own lives. Pray that as they explore Jesus’ teachings, the young people will be open to new understanding of the role they can play, along with saints of old, in working toward the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Luke 6:20–31, 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.

Gather

- ❑ Bring *strips of coloured paper*, *markers*, and *tape*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of the resource sheet “Living Generously”* (p. 5).

Respond

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

- ❑ **Reflections:** *copies of the resource sheet “Thinking about Jesus’ Teaching”* (p. 6), *pencils or pens*
- ❑ **Poster:** *poster board*, *denominational and mission magazines*, *news magazines*, *felt markers*, *scissors*, *glue sticks*
- ❑ **Welcome projects:** *card stock/heavy paper*, *art and craft supplies*, *name tag holders*

Bless

- ❑ Bring *slips of paper* and *markers*.



All Saints Day (Year C)

Scripture

Luke 6:20–31

FOCUS To examine Jesus' teaching about blessings and woes.

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.

Pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

Loving God, we open ourselves to your presence
as we come together to learn how to be your people.
Help us to see your blessings in our lives,
and to share those blessings with others.
Amen.

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

Making connections

Invite young people to think of people who have been role models for them, especially those who have shown God's loving ways through words and/or actions. Ask group members to write these names on strips of coloured paper, then tape strips together to form a paper chain, and place the chain in a circle around the candle in the worship space. Invite those who wish to say something about how the people have helped and inspired them.

Engage

Setting the scene

The reading for today comes from the gospel of Luke and takes place just after Jesus has been teaching and healing a great crowd of people. Read **Luke 6:17**. The gospel writer says that people came from Judea and Jerusalem, as well as from farther away places like the coastal communities of Tyre and Sidon. In the midst of this crowd, Jesus turns specifically to the disciples, and offers a teaching about the life of discipleship, turning some ideas about human relationships upside down.

Moving into the story

Invite young people to listen to the scripture first from the perspective of one who would be considered blessed (that is, someone who has enough money, isn't hungry, isn't sad, is well liked). Read **Luke 6:20–31**. Read the passage again, and invite youth to listen this time from the perspective of someone who is poor, or hungry, or sad, or persecuted. After a few moments of silent reflection

following the reading, talk together about how it felt to listen from both sides.

■ In what ways did you hear the message differently with each reading?

Invite young people to review **Luke 6:20–26** in their Bibles and look first at the teachings about being "blessed."

■ Which groups of people does Jesus name as those who will experience blessing?

The "woes" that Jesus lists are the opposite of the ones that Jesus says will be "blessed." Invite young people to review again **Luke 6:20–26**, noticing the pairs of opposites: blessed are those who are poor/woe to those who are rich; blessed are those who are hungry/woe to those who are full, and so on. It wouldn't have surprised the readers of the gospel of Luke to hear that God really cares about those who are poor, hungry, sad, and despised.

- **What warning does Jesus offer in verses 24–26?**
- **What do you think Jesus wants those who are rich, or full, or laughing, or well liked to know about God’s way?**
- **What do you think Jesus wanted the disciples to know about God’s love and way?**

Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Living Generously” and invite young people to read the paraphrase of **Luke 6:27–31** in the section “Scripture reading.”

- **What does this paraphrase say about how we can live in relationship with one another?**

Connecting scripture with life

Read together the story “Pass it on” on the resource sheet “Living Generously” and encourage young people to share their own stories of passing on God’s way of love.

- **How has Jesus’ teaching, and this story, helped you to understand more about what it means to live in God’s way?**
- **In what ways can you be a “saint,” sharing God’s generous love with others?**

Respond

Choose one or two of the following options.

- **Reflections** Jesus’ teaching challenges us to consider ways we can live in God’s way. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Thinking about Jesus’ Teachings” and invite young people to use these suggestions to reflect further on how they might live out Jesus’ teachings about blessings and woes.
- **Poster** On All Saints Day we recognize the work of God’s saints in the world. Invite youth to review **Luke 6:20–31** to find words that could describe the actions of “saints.” Have them use words and images from magazines to create a collage on a sheet of poster board, including words and phrases from Jesus’ teaching in the focus scripture that characterize a saint, such as “shows love for an enemy.” Around the edges of the poster they might write names of people who are living, or have lived, this way of life.
- **Welcome projects** Jesus speaks of loving others and doing good to others. Invite young people to consider projects in which they could participate that convey the welcome and love expressed in this teaching. Have them use the supplies provided to create “welcome” tags for visitors or create welcome cards to place in pews. Discuss other projects in which they might participate.

Bless

Gather around the worship area. Invite young people to reflect for a few moments on Jesus’ teachings about blessings. Distribute slips of paper and invite youth to complete the sentence: “This week I will be a blessing to others by...” and keep this as a reminder of their commitment.

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

O God, help us to remember,

that we can be your saints,
sharing your love in our community
and being a blessing in the world. Amen.

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

Sending out Close the session by offering the following blessing, “May God help you to be a blessing. Go out into the world, ready to share God’s love with all.”

Reflect

What new insights did young people express about what it means to be a “blessing” and what it

means to be a “saint,” one who lives in God’s way and helps do God’s work of love in the world?



Living Generously

Scripture reading

To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person...

If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously...

Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for *them!*

Excerpts from *Luke 6:27–30*. Scripture taken from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson; copyright ©1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002; used by permission of Navpress Publishing Group.

Pass it on

I read a story, years ago, about a man whose car ran out of gas. A passing motorist stopped, dug a battered red can of gas out of his trunk, and gave it to the author, without charge. The only condition was that he had to pass it on, in turn, to someone else who needed it.

So the writer of the story did. With the same condition. Good fortune must be shared, not hoarded. The can must be passed on. Of course, years later, the same motorist ran out of gas again. And, of course, another one came to his aid. And to his amazement, he was given back the same old gas can, considerably more battered by now, but undeniably the same can.

More recently, I saw a similar kind of story in a church magazine. When the author went to his car in the parking lot, he found that his gas tank cap was missing. His first thought was that someone had swiped it. So he bought himself a locking gas cap. "That'll fix them!" he thought.

But later, he began thinking about two kinds of worlds – the kind where you had to keep everything under lock and key, and the kind where everyone was willing to share. Wouldn't it be much better, he thought, if he saw someone without a gas cap, to share whatever he had, even his only gas cap – knowing that someone else would do the same for him?

That's the kind of world Jesus was talking about, when he gave his disciples the great commandment. "Love others, as I have loved you," he said.

"Pass it on," he was saying. "Don't try to hoard the good things. They're not yours to keep."

Some day, like the gas can, some good that I have done for somebody may come back to me. But if it doesn't – well, all that really matters is that they "pass it on," too.

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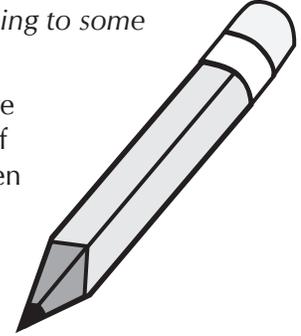


Thinking about Jesus' Teaching

Read today's focus passage, **Luke 6:20–31**. Use the following activities to help you think more deeply about Jesus' teaching about "blessings" and "woes" and connect this teaching to some things going on in your own life or in the community around you.

In today's reading Jesus talks about things being turned around for people who are having a hard time: hungry people will be full and sad people will laugh again. If Jesus came to your school or your town today, who might he be talking about when he says, "Blessed are you...?"

⇒ Write down some groups of people that Jesus might say this to today.



Jesus warns people who are content with what they have and who don't help those in need.

⇒ What might Jesus be saying to us about the way we could live as saints, showing God's generous love?

⇒ How would you put this teaching into your own words for people today?

Jesus also talked about turning relationships upside down: Luke 6:31 is also known as the "Golden Rule." This verse is a good summary of what God expects of us.

⇒ What would you say God expects of us?

⇒ What are some of the things that you would like other people to do for you? How could you take the initiative and do these things for others first?