

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. **Psalm 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
Psalm 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 15–18

Young people are very involved in the world of “new beginnings.” In their personal lives they are often “trying on” new identities as they learn more about themselves through interactions with friends, family, and society. In their outer worlds they are experiencing the new beginnings involved in different schools, falling in love, starting part-time work, and changed relationships with family members. What new beginnings are the members of your group facing? Be aware that some young people may be experiencing, or have recently come through, some of the hard growing pains of adolescence. Some young people also have a passion for being part of “making things new” in the world. They care about the destruction of the environment. They are

conscious of oppression, and poverty, and inequality. As they become more aware of the harshness of reality in many places, teenagers need and want visions of hope and today’s session can provide an opportunity to share concerns, hopes, and visions.

Sometimes mentors and role models can help in offering support for that hope. Today, as we celebrate All Saints Day, encourage young people to think about those who have provided inspiration and encouragement. Young people can also be encouraged to reflect on the ways in which they too are saints, helping to do God’s work of love in the world. Consider how you can listen to, celebrate, and affirm their imaginations. Pray that today’s session will inspire and empower them to participate in God’s vision for a renewed world.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the scriptures, Psalm 24, Isaiah 25:6–9, 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.

Gather

- ❑ Bring *copies of the resource sheet “Psalm 24”* (p. 6).

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of the resource sheet “The Book of Revelation”* (p. 5).
- ❑ Bring a *selection of meditative music*.

Respond

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

- ❑ **Poems:** *sheets of paper, felt markers or coloured pencils*
- ❑ **Mural:** *mural paper, oil pastels, kitchen foil; collage and craft materials*
- ❑ **Thank you cards:** *denominational outreach magazines, church newsletters, information about local community outreach projects, construction paper, coloured paper, art supplies, envelopes, stamps*

Bless

- ❑ Bring *tealights*.



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, a day when Christians honour the memory of saints in the history of our church and those who work towards God’s realm today.

Pray Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Psalm 24” and form two groups to read alternate verses of the paraphrase 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 group members to reflect on times when they experienced the sense of things being made new or times when they were given a second chance or a chance to make a fresh start. Ask:

- **What is hopeful and exciting about this kind of experience?**
- **What is frightening or challenging about it?**

Engage

Setting the scene

The scripture reading for today is about a vision or revelation of a fresh start, of something being made new. It was a vision that helped people in biblical times to visualize God’s promises. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “The Book of Revelation” and invite young people to read the background information.

Scripture reading

Play a selection of meditative music and invite group members to close their eyes as you read **Revelation 21:1–6a**. Read the passage slowly, with a tone of wonder and awe.

- **What images in this passage stand out for you? Why do they stand out?**
- **What does this vision say to you about God’s dream for the world?**

Invite young people to read **Revelation 21:1–6a** for themselves. The writer of Revelation speaks of a new heaven and earth.

- **What are the things that will be no more in this new creation?**

Recall that the Christians in the early church often experienced persecution because of their faith.

- **What words of hope are offered in this vision for those experiencing hardships?**

In the vision we hear the words “I am the Alpha and Omega.” These words represent the first (Alpha) and last (Omega) letters of the Greek alphabet.

- **In what ways does this vision speak of beginnings and endings.**

Look together again at **Revelation 21:3**. *The Message*, a contemporary paraphrase of the scriptures, translates verse 3 as, “Look! God has moved into the neighborhood...”

- **What does this interpretation say to you about God’s reign now and in the future?**
- **How are things different when God is “in the neighbourhood”?**

Digging deeper

Another scripture reading for today, **Isaiah 25:6–9**, also offers a vision of God’s new creation. Invite a volunteer to read these verses. The prophet describes people being called to new life on God’s holy mountain. In biblical times mountains were considered holy places, where heaven and earth met.

- **What messages of hope are offered in this vision from the book of Isaiah?**

- **What similarities and differences do you see between the visions in the book of Isaiah and the revelation to John?**

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.

- **Where in the world do you see a need for renewal?**

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.

- **Who are some people today who hold a vision and help to "make all things new"?**
- **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 embrace God's new creation, here and now. Invite young people to review the information about "Diamante poems" on the resource sheet "Psalm 24" and create poems that celebrate living in the midst of God's new creation. Have them follow the structure, beginning with words naming things in need of renewal and moving to images of God's new creation (such as, "Polluted" to "Pure").
- **Mural** The scripture readings for All Saints Day offer vivid pictures of the wonder of living in the midst of God's creation. Stretch a length of mural paper along a table and invite group members to work together with the art and craft supplies to create a mural of images and



words that express the visions of God's creation described in this day's scripture readings. (*Option:* play a recording of meditative music as they work.)

- **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 whose work helps to ease pain and suffering and promotes 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 group members might become involved in one of the projects.

Bless

Gather around the worship area. Invite young people to reflect for 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. Invite group members to name saints who they would like to bring to mind today, lighting a tealight for each one named.

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

Close the session by offering the following blessing, "May God bless you as you go out to participate in helping to build God's new creation." Invite young people to take a tealight each from the worship space, and light it at home as a reminder that they are part of the community of saints, called to imagine the possibilities of 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 Book of Revelation

The Revelation to John is a challenging book to read and understand. It was written in symbolic language in a time of great danger and persecution. Its language of visions is a kind of secret code that the writer used to encourage Christians to remain faithful and to stand firm against opposition.

Who wrote this book?

The author is named as “John the Divine,” the preacher or teacher. He is not the same person who wrote the gospel of John. The writer of Revelation was a Jewish Christian who was persecuted for his faith. When he wrote Revelation he was living in exile on an island, Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor.

When was it written?

Revelation was written around the year 95 CE, near the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian. Christians were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. There had been some persecution of Christians under emperors Nero and Caligula. Domitian insisted that he be called “My Lord and my God.” Christians refused to pledge allegiance to him in this way and were sometimes brutally punished.

Who was it written for?

The first chapter begins with the words “...to the seven churches that are in Asia...” Since seven is the number symbolic of wholeness, it is believed that these churches probably represent the whole

church. John’s vision is of the final battle between God and the forces of evil. John describes Rome and the emperor as embodiments of evil. He tries to give hope to Christians, saying that very soon the Roman Empire will be overthrown and the reign of God will be established in all its fullness. The author warns Christians against compromise with the religious, social, and economic values of the Roman world. He also writes to encourage them in their faith during times of persecution.

Apocalyptic writing

“Apocalyptic” means the unveiling of something hidden. Apocalyptic writing seeks to encourage people in the midst of their struggles. An early example of apocalyptic literature in the scriptures is the book of Daniel, written during the revolt of the Maccabees (about 165 BCE) to encourage the Jews to revolt against oppression. 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. Salvation will come through Christ, called the Lamb, who died and is alive again, and has the power to overcome evil. John ends his book with a prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus...”

How has the book of Revelation been used?

The early church had trouble deciding whether Revelation should be included in the Bible. It was not accepted into the canon of scripture until the fifth century CE. In our own time, Revelation has sometimes been used to predict the time of the end of the world or to warn of a cataclysmic end to our world. The book of Revelation, however, was not a prediction of future events. The images and symbols were intended to encourage Christians living under Roman persecution to remain faithful and to find hope in their belief that God will reign forever. The message of Revelation for Christians today is the same. We live in God’s world and we affirm God’s reign over the whole of creation, while waiting for the time when Jesus will come to bring God’s reign to fulfillment.



Psalm 24

Turning and turning, our pale blue globe
burns bright in the blackness of eternity.
**The Earth is God's, and all that is in it –
all life embodied in the only home we know.**

God created life in the oceans,
and nourishes it with nutrients from the mountains.
**Trace the course of a river to its source;
stand among the mountains and marvel.
Who would dare defile this paradise?**

God sees through our deceit and pretense;
we cannot claim innocence when we have dirty hands.
**We can only approach God with clean hands and
pure hearts.
Then we will see a smile on the face of God;
Then God's wisdom will be evident in the world.**

So seek God in high and holy places.
**Let the vast valleys throw open their arms,
Let the summits stand tall in pride.
For this is the body of our God!**

With all the glory of the universe to choose from,
with all of creation quivering in expectation,
the God of life picked this planet as home.

**So throw open your valleys, oh earth!
Spread wide your plains to welcome God!
For the God of all creation lives here.**

Psalm 24 *Earth-rise*
From: *Everyday Psalms* by James Taylor. Copyright © 1994
Wood Lake Publishing. Used by permission.

