

# 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.**

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## The Focus for Ages 15–18

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**M**any young people have posters of pop singers, movie stars, bands, or athletes on the walls of their rooms. These are popular heroes and icons that they look up to and want to emulate. Young people may want to imitate their clothing styles, their haircuts, perhaps their way of life. What is it about each of these figures or groups that attracts their attention? What makes these figures or groups popular? Some of them do provide positive role models for young people as they decide what they want to do and to be. Today, on All Saints Sunday, young people will be encouraged to think about those who have been mentors and role models, especially those within the church who have encouraged them in their faith journeys. They will also be encouraged to reflect on the ways in which they too are saints who help to do God's work of love in the world.

Jesus' teachings in Luke's version of "The Beatitudes" includes both blessings and woes.

The teaching about 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, in particular, the teaching about "loving enemies," can be tough ones to understand. Some 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 the reading is explored. A paraphrase of this section of the focus passage is offered on the resource sheet "Living in God's Promise," and may help young people understand the meaning of Jesus' teachings in the context of their own lives. Pray that as young people reflect on the messages in Jesus' teachings, they will be open to new understandings of the role they can play, along with saints of old, in working toward the fulfillment of God's promises.

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## Prepare

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### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the scriptures, Luke 6:20–31, Ephesians 1:11–23, 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 "Living in God's Promise"* (p. 5).
- ❑ Bring *strips of coloured paper*.

### Respond

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

- ❑ **Reflective writing:** *copies of the resource sheet "Reflections"* (p. 6), *pencils or pens*, *writing paper*
- ❑ **Collage:** *poster board*, *denominational and mission magazines*, *news magazines*, *scissors*, *glue sticks*, *felt markers*
- ❑ **Welcome projects:** *card stock/heavy paper*, *art and craft supplies*, *name-tag holders*

### Bless

- ❑ Bring *tealights*, *slips of paper*, and *pencils or pens*.



# 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** Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Living in God's Promise" and invite youth to read in unison the "Opening prayer" by Martin Luther.

**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, through their words or their actions, have demonstrated what it means to be a follower of Christ. 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 this day 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 records that people came from Judea and Jerusalem as well as from the coastal communities of Tyre and Sidon. The references to Tyre and Sidon may imply that those listening to Jesus were Gentile (that is, non-Jews) as well as Jewish people. In the midst of this large audience, Jesus turns specifically to the disciples. Read **Luke 6:20**. Although the teaching appears to be addressed particularly to Jesus' followers, it seems that the whole crowd might have been listening. As Jesus teaches about the life of discipleship, he turns some usual human understandings upside down.

### Scripture reading

Read **Luke 6:20–31**, inviting young people to listen to the scripture reading from the perspective of those who are considered blessed (that is, those who are well-fed, happy, well liked). Read the passage again, inviting young people to listen from the perspective of those who are

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? How did your responses differ?**

Jesus' teaching about blessings and woes is offered in four sets of pairs. Invite young people to review **Luke 6:20–26** and make a list of these parallels.

■ **Who are those that Jesus is saying will experience blessing?**

■ **What do you make of the list of woes Jesus gives? What does that list say to you?**

It wouldn't have surprised the readers of the gospel of Luke to hear that God really cares about the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and those who are despised.

■ **What do you think Jesus was calling the disciples to do in response to this teaching?**

In the last verses of today's scripture passage, we hear a teaching about discipleship. Invite a volunteer to read **Luke 6:27–31** again. Then read together the excerpt from the paraphrase *The Message* in the "Scripture reading" section of the resource sheet "Living in God's Promise." Talk together about each statement.

- **What does this teaching say about how we are meant to be in relationship with one another?**

### Digging deeper

Like many of Jesus' teachings, **Luke 6:20–31** addresses what it means to live both in, and toward, the reign of God. Invite young people to notice the present tense of Jesus' statements. Jesus seems to be saying that by living in God's way we help to contribute to God's reign. As saints in Christ, we have a place in

God's reign. Invite group members to review another reading for this day, **Ephesians 1:11–23**, jotting down words or phrases that are mentioned in Paul's prayer that speak of the gifts we receive from Christ.

- **In what ways might these gifts help us to participate in the vision of God's reign?**

### Connecting scripture with life

Invite young people to recall those people who were named as role models during the gathering activity. Read together read the story "Pass it on" on the resource sheet "Living in God's Promise." Encourage young people to share their own stories of passing on God's way of love.

- **In what ways has Jesus' teaching, and this story, opened you to new understanding of how saints of God live?**

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## Respond

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Choose one or more of the following options.

- Reflective writing** Jesus' teaching tells us that those who trust in God and live faithful lives are blessed. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Reflections" and invite young people to use these suggestions to reflect further on how they might live out Jesus' teachings in their lives.
- Collage** On All Saints Day we recognize the work of God's saints in the world. Review together the gospel reading for this day, **Luke 6:20–31**, and make a list of descriptions of "saints." (For example, shows love for an enemy.) Invite young people to create a poster to illustrate these characteristics, using words



and images from magazines to create a collage of Jesus' teaching on a sheet of poster board. 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.

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## Bless

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**Gather** around the worship area. Invite young people to reflect for a few moments on Jesus' teachings about blessings and woes. Distribute slips of paper and pencils and invite young people to complete the sentence "This week I will be a blessing by..." and keep these as reminders of their commitment.

**Pray** Invite young people to take turns lighting tea-lights and placing them in a circle around the cen-

tral candle as they offer this prayer, aloud or silently: "O God, help me to be a blessing to others, as I have been blessed."

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

**Close the session by** offering the following blessing, "You are blessed by God to be a blessing."

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## Reflect

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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 in God's Promise

## Opening prayer

Look, Lord, here is an empty mug that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it.  
 I am frail in the faith;  
     strengthen me.  
 I am cold in love;  
     warm me and make me fervent, that my love may reach out to my neighbour.  
 I do not have a strong and stable faith;  
     at times I doubt and am unable to trust you completely.  
 O Lord, help me.  
 Strengthen my faith and trust in you.  
 Amen.

Martin Luther (1483–1536)

## 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."

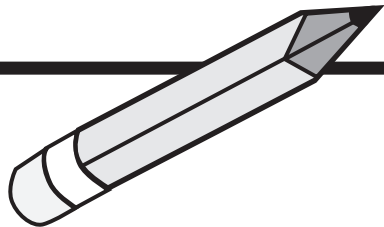
Some day, like the gas can, some good that I have done for somebody may come back to me. But if it doesn't – well, all that really matters is that they "pass it on," too.

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# Reflections

Here are some ideas for reflecting on what you have heard in Jesus' teachings about blessings and woes. Choose one or two of these ideas and use them to express what you think and feel about the teaching and about some things going on in your own life right now.



## Reversals

The scriptures are full of reversals such as those in today's reading from **Luke 6:20–31**. The hungry will be filled; the ones who are laughing will mourn and weep; love your enemies. Think of some of the things that are going on in the world today. If Jesus were giving this teaching today, to whom might he say, "Blessed are you..." and to whom might he say, "Woe to you..." Write your own pairs of blessings and woes based on situations in your own life, your community, and/or the world.

*Blessed are you who...*

*Woe to you who...*

## Love your enemies

In **Luke 6:27** Jesus offers some challenging statements about relationships. Compose a prayer or poem about some of the "enemies" that you would like to see showing love to each other in our world today. Begin each sentence with one or more of the following phrases:

*"Love..."*

*"Do good to..."*

*"Bless..."*

*"Pray for..."*

## Acrostic thoughts

Acrostic poems are made up of words or phrases whose first letters spell another word. Choose a word from today's reading, **Luke 6:20–31**, and use it as a base to reflect on how this teaching connects with your own life.

Here is an example:

**B**lessings...where have I experienced blessing in my life?

**L**oving my enemies...how can I love that person who is always cutting me down?

**E**xactly what is Jesus asking me to do?

**S**aints are those who really can pray for someone who has hurt them...how am I able to do this?

**S**urprising teaching...do to others as you would have them do to you...how can I live this out in my life?