

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 **Psalms 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
Psalms 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 Adults

Have you ever been distracted by an accident you notice on the side of the road or in the rearview mirror, and then have nearly caused an accident yourself? Or maybe you were so intent on the uneven pavement under your feet that you nearly ran into another pedestrian? Where we are looking can make all the difference. All Saints Day invites us to gaze forward to the time when God's promises to all who believe will be fulfilled. A saint is one who has been chosen, or set apart, for the work of God, and this includes all those baptized into Christ. This may be a new understanding for some in the group. Pray for group members, that all may grow in understanding of what it means to live as a saint in God's reign.

The focus passage for today, Luke 6:20–31, is Jesus' teaching on blessings and woes, and this teaching may turn upside down the understanding of blessing and woe in your culture. Most adults reflect from time to time on what seem to be the "blessings" and "woes" in their own lives; however, their opinions about the definitions of these words may differ. Specifically, in considering God's blessings, some may find it difficult to believe they are blessed if they are facing difficult economic or relationship situations. Many adults find Jesus' teaching to be challenging and surprising, so allow time for the group to wrestle with the ideas.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures – Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11–23; Luke 6:20–31 – and biblical background material.
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.

Gather

- ❑ Prepare the worship space with *white fabric* and a *candle*. Bring *matches* or a *lighter*.
- ❑ Bring the *hymnal* or *songbook* your church uses, and select a hymn designated for All Saints Day or for giving thanks for community.
- ❑ Bring *tealights*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of the biblical background material* for this session.
- ❑ Bring *copies of "Luke 6:20–31,"* one of the resource sheets for this session.

- ❑ Bring *pens or pencils*.
- ❑ Bring *newsprint* and *markers*.
- ❑ Be sure to have *several Bible versions* available.
- ❑ Bring *copies of the faith statement or mission statement for your church or denomination*.

Respond

- ❑ **Prayers:** *Seasons of the Spirit poster with a strong sense of light and shadow, writing paper*
- ❑ **All Saints' cards:** *blank greeting cards or drawing paper, markers in a variety of colours, envelopes; list of those preparing for Confirmation (Affirmation of Baptism) in your congregation*
- ❑ **Poetry response:** *copies of "Poetry Primer," one of the resource sheets for this session; writing paper*

Bless

- ❑ Bring *a dish of water*.



All Saints Day (Year C)

Scripture

Luke 6:20–31

FOCUS To ponder the ways we place ourselves in the presence of Christ.

Gather

Greet members by name as they arrive.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Note that on All Saints Day we honour the saints who have gone before us and also anticipate living in Christ's presence for eternity. Invite group members to name the past saints who are on their minds today, lighting a tealight for each one and placing it in the worship space.

Sing a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources or a hymn for All Saints Day from

the hymnal or songbook used by your church.

Pray Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Psalm 149** as an opening prayer.

Moving into the theme

Ask group members to think back on their week, identifying one thing that happened that they would consider a “blessing” and one thing they would consider a “woe.” Discuss:

- **What adjectives would you use to describe something that is a blessing? Something that is a woe?**

Engage

Set the context

Distribute copies of the biblical background material for this session. Set the scene by asking a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs of the “Focus scripture” section.

Explore the texts

Distribute copies of “**Luke 6:20–31**” resource sheet. Ask group members to circle words that suggest the key point of each verse as they listen to a volunteer read the text aloud. Form pairs to compile a list of the key words on half-sheets of newsprint and display the finished lists. Discuss:

- **Based on these lists, what seems to be the thrust or intent of this passage?**
- **What dichotomies strike you in these verses? What stands out as reversals from the prevailing attitudes of contemporary culture?**

Comment that one way to define *blessings* are those things that open us up; *woes* are those things that close us down. Consult other Bible versions for additional translations of key words as you discuss:

- **In what ways are “the poor” blessed? Those who hunger? Those who weep? Those who suffer for their faith? Does this make sense to you? Why or why not?**

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

- **When will the blessings that Jesus teaches about be present?**

Like many of Jesus’ teachings, **Luke 6:20–31** addresses what it means to live both in and toward the reign of God.

- **The passage mentions the “kingdom of God.” What do you deduce about this reign of God from these verses?**

In **Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18**, we encounter Daniel’s vision of four beasts. Form pairs to read this text and report on what promise is made to “holy ones.”

- **Based on this passage, what would you say about God and the nature of God’s reign?**

As saints in Christ, we have a place in God’s reign. Invite group members to skim **Ephesians 1:11–23**, jotting down words or phrases that speak of the gifts we receive from Christ.

- **What role does Baptism play in the life of a saint?**
- **What strengthens us to bring God’s healing and blessing to others – to invite them to participate in the vision of God’s reign?**

Make life connections

Distribute copies of a statement of faith or mission statement for your church or denomination. Review it as a group.

- **How does this statement of faith compare with the key message of Luke 6:20–31?**
- **If you were writing guidelines for how to live**

as God’s saints, what would you include from the readings for this session?

Saints are invited to live in the presence of God’s promises and work toward their fulfillment.

- **In what ways do you – as an individual and as a church – live into God’s promised reign by sharing the blessings you have received?**

Respond

Choose one or two of the following options:

- **Prayers** Those who trust in God and live faithful lives are blessed, declares Jesus. Allow a quiet moment to view the *Seasons of the Spirit* poster you have selected, then offer this guided meditation for silent reflection: Read aloud **Luke 6:24–26**. Ask: Where do you place yourself in this image as you hear these words? What assurance do these words evoke? What fear? Write your prayer at hearing these words. Read aloud **Luke 6:20–23**. Ask: Where do you place yourself in this image as you hear these words? What assurance do these words evoke? What fear? Write your prayer at hearing these words. Invite members to share their prayers during Bless if they feel comfortable doing so.
- **All Saints Day cards** In Baptism, individuals join the communion of saints who live in the presence of Christ. In the Affirmation of Baptism

(Confirmation), individuals affirm God’s claim on their lives. What words from the readings today would you want to share with those preparing for confirmation? Create All Saints Day cards for each one preparing for confirmation in your church, celebrating that you are saints together in God’s reign and encouraging them in their preparation for Affirmation of Baptism (Confirmation).

- **Poetry response** Fresh perspectives on life come to those who live in Christ’s presence. Create poems that express your insights on life as a saint. You might include references to the scripture passages. Refer to “Poetry Primer” resource sheet for ideas. Share the poems during Bless. With the writers’ permission, include the poems in the church newsletter.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and sing a blessing song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources or the hymn you have selected. Invite group members to offer their prayers or poems (if these options were chosen for Respond).

Invite group members to name saints – renowned or known only to them – whose vision invites other people to look ahead to the day when God’s promises will be fulfilled. Imagine that these saints are with you in the room. What words of encouragement would they speak?

Ask participants to place a few fingers in the bowl of water as you offer this prayer:

Blessed are all your saints, O God. We put our trust in you. Plant us where we are needed and sustain us in the work of your reign. Hold us close and give us the courage to follow you. Make us part of the blessing that is your desire for all. Amen.

As members depart, have them touch their wet fingertips to the hand or forehead of a neighbour – perhaps making the sign of the cross – as they say, “You are blessed by God to be a blessing.”

Reflect

What new insights into being a saint were expressed by group members? How open do you think group

members are when speaking about issues of blessing, woe, and discipleship?



Luke 6:20–31 (NRSV)

- ²⁰ Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
- ²¹ “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
- ²² “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.
- ²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.
- ²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
- ²⁵ “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.
- ²⁶ “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.
- ²⁷ “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
- ²⁸ “bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
- ²⁹ “If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.
- ³⁰ “Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.
- ³¹ “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”



Poetry Primer

Poetry can be a satisfying way to express thoughts and feelings. When writing poetry, there are no right or wrong answers! Here are some poetry-writing ideas to get you started.

I used to

Write a series of lines beginning “I used to be... but now I am...” or “I used to think that... but now I know that...” These can be group or individual poems.

You are there

Put yourself into the shoes of the main subject of a scripture passage. *I am Zacchaeus*. What do I want to say about my life? Or choose a character who is or who might have been in the story – Zacchaeus’s wife, one of the nine with leprosy who did not return to thank Jesus, someone in the temple watching the Pharisee and the tax collector.

I wish

This can be an individual or group poem. Ask each person to compose a line beginning “I wish...” or “I dream of a world where...”

Record each line on newsprint. Arrange the lines together in a way that makes a pleasing flow and supports the meaning of the lines that have been contributed.

I wish that there would be food enough for all.

I wish we could give peace a chance.

I wish the way of God’s reign would become clear to all of us who share this planet.

Recite your group poem together. Use colour paper or markers to add meaning to your poem through shape and image.

Cinquain

A cinquain is a poem of five lines that follows this form:

Line 1 – 1 noun

Line 2 – 2 adjectives

Line 3 – 3 verbs

Line 4 – 4 words giving the writer’s opinion

Line 5 – 1 word – another name for subject

Widow

Persistent, pushy

Knocked, called, demanded

Her perseverance won reward.

Blessed.

Metaphors

The scriptures are full of metaphors: Jesus is the bread of life; the reign of God is a great banquet; God is my shepherd. Choose a topic – such as: *The reign of God is...* and create a series of metaphors. Engage all your senses. What does the reign of God feel like, smell like, taste like, look like? What in your daily life makes you think of God’s reign?

Haiku

Haiku are poems with three short lines of five, seven, and five syllables. The words speak of a mood or a strong feeling.

Poor Lazarus dies.

Send him to my brothers now.

No, they will not hear.

Take key words from a scripture passage and create this brief poem using them.