

On the Right Road

On this All Saints Day when we are reminded of the saints who have gone before, we encounter texts that blur the line between past, present, and future by encouraging us to travel the long trodden road toward God's love, justice, and liberation.

Focus scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

Those who follow Jesus up the mountain, both disciples and the crowd, can hardly be faulted for being reminded of Moses who helped shape a motley crew of wandering ex-slaves into a community of liberation. Biblical scholars point out the many ways the gospel of Matthew helps make the connection between Jesus and Moses. It is on this mountain that Jesus offers an inaugural sermon akin to Jesus' inaugural message at Nazareth, which is recorded in the gospel of Luke. In both Nazareth and on the mountain, Jesus sets forth the identity, purpose, and direction of his ministry.

The crowd, hanging further back, are keenly aware of the poverty and injustices they face at the hands of imperial Rome. Can this Jesus make any difference in their lives and world? The disciples have already thrown their lot in with Jesus, but their understanding of what Jesus is calling them to be and do is still in the formative stage. As a prophet and leader of the divinely inspired liberation movement to which Moses earlier gave leadership, Jesus knows what is at stake.

By his very life, Jesus represents for the people the character of God who calls them into a liberated and justice-oriented way of living that is in direct opposition to the controlling, oppressive way of living established by Rome. Jesus invites and encourages them to be citizens of this new way of being, which he calls the kingdom of God.

The blessings that follow only make sense for a people who recognize the threat of domination systems because they live it. Each blessing is designed to support, encourage, and nurture a way of life that is counter to the exploitation and oppression they are familiar with. In his commentary in *Feasting on the Word*, Patrick Gray tells us that the word blessing translated from the Hebrew *ashar* is best translated "you are on the right road." In other words, Jesus says, "You are on the right road when you are in poor in spirit...when you mourn...when you are meek...when you

hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Being on the right road and blessing are synonymous. There is no contradiction between mourning and blessing if you are on the road toward God's realm of liberation and justice. Each of the blessings takes on new and vital meaning because they are no longer about an unrealizable aspiration. On the contrary, they are about the energy, spirit, and power given to everyone in the present who is on this road. For those who are on the right road, there also exists a new experience of time, one in which those who have died or gone before share in the present, offering support and encouragement. Something we might expect from all the saints.

Revelation 7:9–1 confronts imperial Rome and systems of domination with vivid and dramatic eschatological language, picturing a future in which the blessings have come into fullness. Differences of language, culture, or any other means of human separation create no barriers for inclusion in this place of justice, compassion, and healing. Revelation calls upon the churches to become witnesses to this ultimate promise.

The writer of **Psalm 34:1–10, 22** refuses to let troubles of any sort keep one from living in the blessing and presence of God. In all situations, one can magnify the glory of God because it is never about momentary loss, but rather living in relationship with this God of liberation, justice, and mercy.

1 John 3:1–3 returns to the theme of identity and purpose. Core to that identity is the basic premise of knowing you are loved. It is this love that purifies us for living as citizens of God's realm.

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In this week's readings, there is no disconnect between hard times and God's love. Just the opposite, love can lead us into the struggle of a new way of living, a new world. The blessing comes in knowing this road, this path, however challenging, is one that leads to life?



Focus scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

Additional scriptures

Revelation 7:9–1

Psalm 34:1–10

1 John 3:1–3



Seasons of the Spirit is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

Blessed One, you never cease to surprise us. We grow accustomed to a way of accounting for our lives that often puts us in the losing column. Help us claim the identity and direction you offer to us so that we may stay on the road to your freedom, justice, mercy, and compassion. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

At the end of each session is a blessing for the children. Sometimes the words are more like sending forth, but every one is a reminder that each child belongs to God. However, the children probably do not think of these words as a blessing. Yet they experience a blessing each time they attend. In the focus scripture, Jesus' blessings do not name people, but are given to categories of people. In this session, the children will be able to think about how they are blessed and how they are blessings. The Greek word that is translated "blessed" might also be translated as "happy," "full of joy," or "deeply happy." "Blessed" is used here to maintain the

traditional use of it and because a new word is less likely to be confused with the ideas of happiness and what it means today.

This Sunday is All Saints Day. The children are probably familiar with the names of saints in the names of congregations, perhaps your own. They may be less likely to associate saints with people they know or people after the biblical eras. After this session, they may even think of themselves as belonging to the company of saints of God.

Pray that each child in your group will join in giving thanks for the saints of the church and be open to being included in that number.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 67).
- Set a worship space with white cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark in focus passage, and basket of green, flat-bottomed glass stones.
- Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 3 and 6), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- Bring, if possible, the song "Come into God's Presence" (p. 9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #2 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).

Engage

- Prepare to tell story on today's resource sheet "[Teaching on the Mountain](#)."
- For matching game group, bring copies of today's resource sheet "[Teaching on the Mountain](#)" and card stock/heavy paper.

Respond

Gather or make the materials for the zones selected.

- Art zone:** mural paper
- Cooperation zone:** poster board, heavy yarn, and drinking straws
- Quiet zone:** today's resource sheet "[Teaching on the Mountain](#)"
- Meditation zone:** copies of today's resource sheet "[Labyrinth](#)" and, if possible, song "I Want Jesus to Go with Me" (#11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 6)
- Outreach zone:** today's resource sheet "[Saints of God Bookmarks](#)," poster board, hole punch, and ribbon

Bless

- Bring, if possible, song "Live in the Spirit of Love" (p. 22 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #31 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).



On the Right Road

Scripture

Matthew 5:1-12

FOCUS To discover that we are blessed by God and called to be saints of God

Gather

Welcome the children. Introduce any newcomers to the group and share experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Point out the white cloth. Explain that today we celebrate All Saints Day, a time to remember all the people in the past and present who love God and are followers of Jesus. Distribute name tags and invite children to add their names and decorate with glitter. Gather in a circle and welcome each other by saying, "Welcome, Saint (*child's name*)!"

Lead the group in the following litany:

Leader: We are on a journey and
 God's light goes with us.
(Invite a child to light the candle.)
 God's Spirit is deep inside and all around,

helping us as we learn and grow.
(Invite children to place glass stones in a spiral leading out from the candle.)
 God breathes love into everything.

All: **Thank you, God!**

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song, "Come into God's Presence" (p. 9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #2 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).

Pray *(Invite children to repeat each line after you.)*

Loving God, thank you
 for each person here.
 May we feel you with us, as we learn
 more about your way to live and love.
 Amen. Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to think of people that they admire. This could be someone famous, such as a movie star, athlete, or world leader, or it might be a favourite relative, sibling, or friend. Explain that saints are people who have characteristics that others admire. Saints are those who us to live in God's way. Invite children to name other people they know or know of who show God's love and can be called saints.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Matthew. Point out that it is in the New Testament part of the Bible, the first of four gospels that tell stories about Jesus and his teachings. In Today's story is from a section called "The Sermon on the Mount."

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Teaching on the Mountain](#)," based on **Matthew 5:1-12**, to tell the story.

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Song group New words to "If You're Happy and You Know It" provide this group with ways to think about being blessed by God. Sing the song or read the words below to the children:

If you're blessed and you know it, pass it on.
 If you're blessed and you know it, pass it on.
 We are blessed and we know it.
 And we really want to show it.
 We are blessed. Jesus tells us, "Pass it on."

Every time you sing, “We are blessed,” shake hands. Pause to invite the children name ways that they are blessed or ways they can be blessings to others. If you have time, change the first line to: “You are blessed, Saint (*child’s name*), pass it on.” and the last line to: “You are blessed, Saint (*child’s name*), pass it on.” Sing the song once with each child’s name.

Matching game group Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Teaching on the Mountain](#),” and invite this group to compare the paraphrase with the text of Matthew 5:1–12.

- 1 Read the words of Jesus in “Teaching on the Mountain.” Then read Matthew 5:3–12 in the Bible.

- 2 Match each sentence of Jesus’ teaching on the story page with the verses in Matthew 5.

- 3 Using the teachings from the story or from Matthew, write each one on a piece of card stock or heavy paper.

- 4 Cut the teachings in half and mix them up.

- 5 Try to match the cards to get the complete sentences of Jesus’ teachings, checking them with the story page or Bible.

The Bible story and us

Invite the song group to sing the song several times for the other children, taking turns shaking hands as they sing “We are blessed.” Invite the game group to demonstrate the game with several of the matching pairs of cards.

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Art zone: Wall of saints** We can all be saints of God. Invite the children to make a visual statement of this by creating a wall mural of saints. Tape a long strip of mural paper to a wall in the learning area or a hallway nearby at a height that allows you to trace around the head and shoulders of each child. Invite the children to draw in their features and hair with crayons and print their names below their figures. Add the title “Saints of God” to the mural and display in the meeting space.
- ❑ **Cooperation zone: Garland of blessing** All Saints Day is a good time to think about the blessings that we have, and the people who have been a blessing in our lives. Distribute two star or diamond shapes to each child and invite children to print their names on one of the shapes and the name of someone who has been a blessing in their lives on the other shape. Decorate with markers or crayons and punch a hole in the top of each one. String the shapes onto a length of yarn, placing segments of drinking straws between each one. Hand the garland in the learning space as a reminder of God’s blessings.
- ❑ **Quiet zone: Litany** Jesus named many people as blessed. Invite children to prepare a litany to name these groups. On the top of one sheet of newsprint, print the response for the litany prayer: “God, bless them.” Ask questions based on the teaching of Jesus on the resource sheet “[Teaching on the Mountain](#),” such as, “Who are people who might feel they are without hope?” Encourage the children to name groups, such as people whose homes were destroyed, rather than specific names. On the newsprint, write the names of all the groups of people. To pray the litany together, rehearse the response. Then read each group of people and say the response together. Conclude with “Amen.”
- ❑ **Meditation zone: Labyrinth** As we try to live God’s way and live Jesus’ teachings, we need to take time to be apart and think about such teachings. One way to do this is to walk the path of a labyrinth to meditate and pray. Labyrinths are usually found outdoors but some people also like to use a finger labyrinth. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Labyrinth](#)” and help children find the place to begin and to see how following the path takes one into the middle of the labyrinth and then out to the beginning place again. Invite them to think about the saints in their lives as they move a finger along the path, or use a pencil to follow the path. Encourage the children to take their labyrinths home and use them for prayer or meditation.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Bookmarks** Saints are people who help us to follow Jesus' teachings and live in God's way. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Saints of God Bookmarks](#)" and review the instructions. Invite children to make bookmark gifts for the saints

in their lives, encouraging them to each make several bookmarks. Consider making them for the leaders of your congregation as well as the people the children name.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Live in the Spirit of Love" (p. 22 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #31 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).

Blessing prayer or one of your own:

Thank you, God, for the people who have saved these stories about you and your people so we can hear them today. Amen.

Reflect

In what ways were the children able to see themselves as servants of others? In what ways were they able to see themselves as leaders, showing others about living in God's way?



TEACHING ON THE MOUNTAIN

(based on Matthew 5:1–12)

If you have space, invite the children to follow you as you walk around the learning space. Begin the story and have everyone sit down when the disciples sit down.

Jesus' days were busy. He walked all over Galilee, teaching in synagogues and healing the sick. He taught the good news of God's plan for everyone. People told their friends, and crowds of people came when they heard Jesus was heading their way.

When Jesus saw the crowd of people, he went up the mountain. The disciples, Jesus' closest friends, went along. When they came to a small flat area, Jesus sat down. This was a signal for the others to sit down too because Jesus was going to teach them. The crowd of people was nearby, so they could hear Jesus' words too.

After time to rest, Jesus began to teach the disciples, saying,

"Blessed are people who feel hopeless for they will again know that God is with them.

"Blessed are the people who see the deep hurts in the world for they will see that God is with them.

"Blessed are the people who wait for God's ways to cover the earth for they will see the greatness of God.

"Blessed are the people who look for justice and fairness for everyone for they will see the mercy of God.

"Blessed are the people who show kindness to others for they will know the forgiveness of God.

"Blessed are the people who seek to follow God's way for they will know themselves to be in the presence of God.

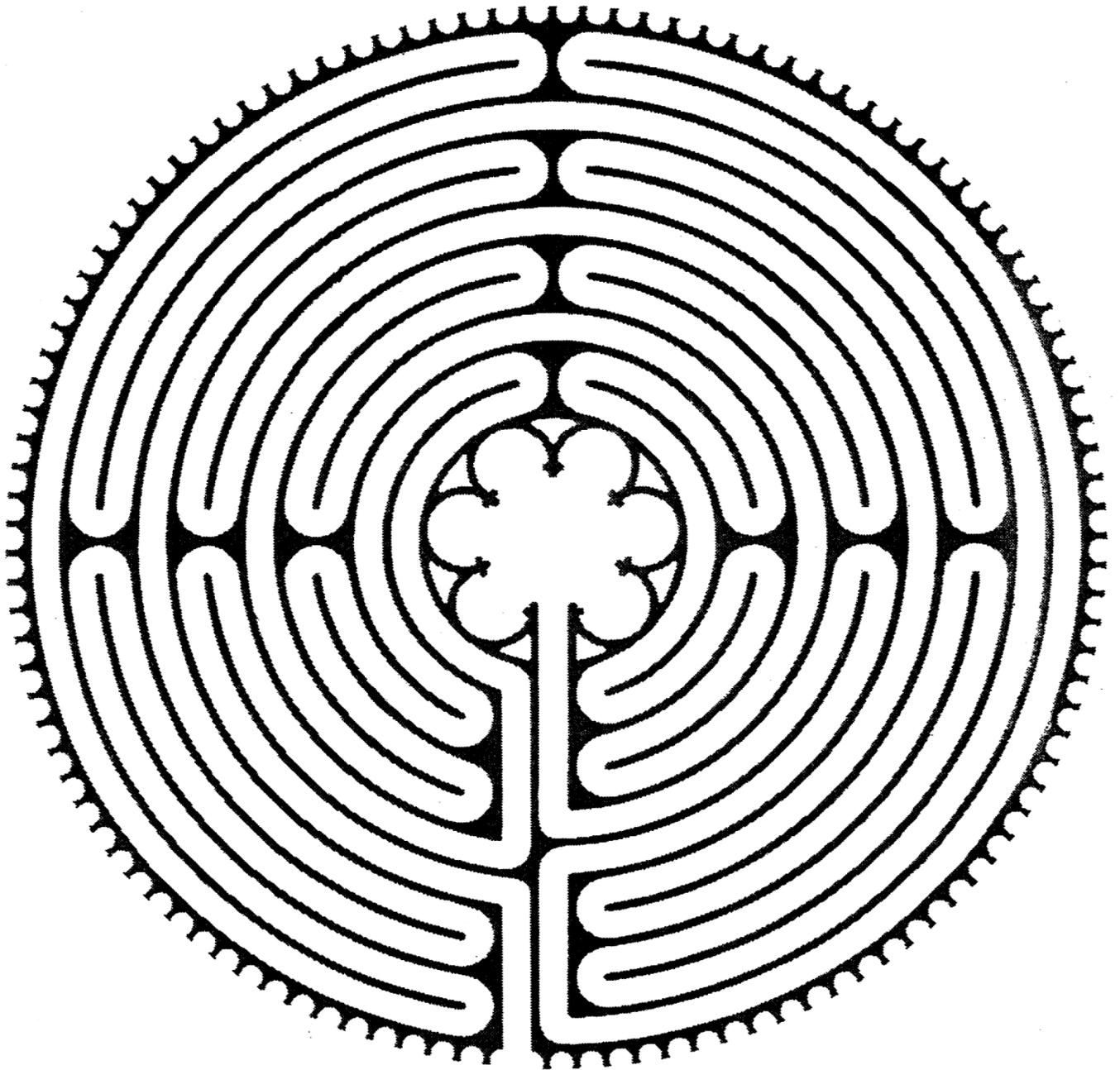
"Blessed are the people who work for peace for they will know that they are children of God.

"Blessed are the people who are shamed or punished for following God's way for they will be with God forever.

"Blessed are you when people call you names because you love God. Be full of joy for God will not forget you."



Labyrinth





Saints of God Bookmarks

Materials

- card stock or heavy paper, cut into rectangles
- markers
- hole punch
- ribbon

Directions

- 1 Select someone you know who is a saint of God.
- 2 Print that person's name on one side of the bookmark.
- 3 On the other side, print: You are a saint of God.
- 4 Punch a hole near the top of the bookmark.
- 5 Put a piece of ribbon through the hole and tie it in place.
- 6 Deliver or send your bookmark to the person.

