All Saints Day November 1, 2026
Revelation 7:9-17, Matthew 5:1-12
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Today is All Saints Day, a day when Christians remember those who have gone before us in faith. It is also a Sunday when we welcome our friends from Presbytery, reminding us that our congregation is part of a wider church. Over this month, we are exploring snippets from the new phrasing of a congregational statement describing who we are and what we are up to: *As followers of Jesus, together we worship deeply, equip disciples, lead humbly, and serve with hope and grace.*

Today, our Scripture readings shed light on the opening words: **"As followers of Jesus, together…"** These words may seem straightforward. We are followers of Jesus, and we do this together. But there is something important here about who we are, how we live, and how we understand ourselves as the church.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus goes up the mountain, sits down, and begins to teach. His disciples come to him, and he speaks about the people who are blessed in God's kingdom.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.
Blessed are those who mourn.
Blessed are the meek.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Jesus is not simply offering a list of admirable qualities for individuals to cultivate. Jesus is showing us what life looks like when we orient ourselves around him. To be a follower of Jesus is not simply to agree with certain teachings or to identify ourselves as Christian on the Canadian census form. It is to allow Jesus to shape how we see the world, how we treat other people, and what we understand to be important.

Jesus is describing a community whose values are not necessarily the values of the world around it. The world often celebrates strength, success, influence, wealth, and the ability to get ahead. Jesus speaks of humility, mercy, mourning, peacemaking, and a hunger for righteousness. He tells us that God's blessing is found in places where we might not expect to find it. It means learning to recognize God at work in lament. It means caring about justice, not only when injustice affects us personally. It means choosing mercy when resentment would be easier, working for peace when division is more appealing, and seeking what is right even when doing so comes at a cost.

On this Sunday, as we remember the saints, we remember people who have sought to live in this way. We are grateful for the faithfulness of those who have gone before us, but we do

not assume that everything done in the past was right simply because it was familiar. Nor do we assume that everything we do today is right simply because it is ours. The history of the church includes great courage and compassion, but also failures, exclusions, and abuses of power. Saints are not people who never struggled, never doubted, or never made mistakes. They are people whose lives, in all their complexity, have been caught up in the grace of God. God's grace has worked through imperfect people.

As we remember the saints, we also remember that the same calling rests upon us. We are not simply looking back at people who followed Jesus. We are being invited to follow him ourselves.

The new statement begins not with a list of things the church hopes to accomplish, but with an identity: **we are followers of Jesus.** Everything else flows from that identity. We worship deeply because we follow Jesus. We equip disciples because we follow Jesus. We lead humbly and serve with hope and grace because we follow Jesus.

And we do this together. In Matthew's Gospel, the disciples come to Jesus. They gather around him to listen and learn. Jesus is not simply giving each person a private set of instructions to take home. He is forming a community of disciples.

And in Revelation, John is given a vision of an enormous gathering around the throne of God. He sees a great multitude that no one can count, from every ethnicity, from all tribes and peoples and languages. They are standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, holding palm branches, and praising God.

Not meant to overwhelm introverts or those with social anxiety. John is encouraging the small, vulnerable communities of Christians to whom Revelation first spoke. Those early Christians lived in a world where they could feel insignificant, exposed, and even threatened because of their faith. They were a small minority in the vast Roman Empire. It might have been difficult to imagine that the church would amount to very much.

Herbert O'Driscoll, the late Canadian Anglican priest and author, writes: "To a Christian of that early generation… the concepts of John's vision must have been thrilling. Seen with the eye of faith he or she belonged to a vast company whose bonds stretched beyond time and space into the ultimate reality of God's presence."

There are times when a Christian can feel alone; there are times a small congregation can feel isolated and irrelevant.

Revelation offers us a larger vision. **It is Christ who gathers us, and Christ who gives our gathering its meaning.** We come from different backgrounds, with different gifts, experiences, convictions, and needs. We will not always agree. We will sometimes

disappoint one another. We will sometimes need to practise the very mercy and peacemaking that Jesus describes in the Beatitudes.

But our togetherness is not based on our being alike, or on our always getting along. It is based on the grace of Christ, who calls us to himself and teaches us to belong to one another. We are being shaped to belong to one another.

Pretty important in this moment of our life together. New faces - either because we are new and meeting others, or because we've been at St. John's for a long time and we see there are folks visiting, checking things out.

Intentionality to belong to one another. Sitting with someone at coffee - tell me your story, and treating it like the precious gift that it is. Means giving the power to make decisions and mistakes and working through belonging. Means stepping in to give our time, finances, and initiative. We are called to encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, teach the faith to the next generation, and make room for those who are searching for a place to belong.

Following Jesus *together* means that we do not carry the Christian life alone, and it gives us the responsibility to help others discover that they do not have to carry it alone either.

Revelation invites our understanding of togetherness even further. John's vision is not of one congregation, one denomination, one nation, or one generation. It is of a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

The church is bigger than we can see. On All Saints Day, we remember that our connection to the people of God reaches across time. We belong to a story that began long before us and will continue long after us. How we steward the church today for the generations to come.

But our connection also reaches across place. We are part of a church that extends beyond our own congregation, with brothers and sisters in Christ worshipping and serving in other communities, countries, and cultures. Mission moment about the church at work around the world.

That is one reason it is meaningful to welcome our Presbytery today. A visit from Presbytery might seem, at first glance, like a matter of church organization. We have meetings, committees, shared responsibilities, and decisions to make. All of those things matter. But beneath the organization is something deeper: a reminder that we are not an isolated congregation doing our own thing.

We belong to one another. We share a faith, a history, a calling, and a responsibility for the church's witness in the world. We can encourage one another, learn from one another, and

support one another in ministry. We can be reminded that the joys and challenges we experience here are shared by other congregations, too.

Our connection to the wider church is not simply something to celebrate. It is something that shapes how we live and serve. It reminds us that our faith is not our private possession, that our mission is not ours alone, and that we are accountable to the gospel we proclaim.

So, what does it mean to begin our mission statement with the words, *"As followers of Jesus, together…"*?

It means that our identity begins with Christ. We are people who are learning to live his way, to embody the mercy and justice of his kingdom, and to discover the blessings he describes in the Beatitudes.

It means that we are gathered into a community. We do not follow Jesus alone. We gather around him in worship, in Scripture, in the sacraments, and in the ordinary work of caring for one another.

And it means that we belong to something much larger than ourselves. We are connected to the saints who have gone before us, to Christians in congregations throughout our denomination and beyond, and to that great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language whom John sees gathered around the throne of God.

> "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
> and thanksgiving and honor
> and power and might
> be to our God forever and ever! Amen."