

# FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## *All Saints' Sunday*

November 6, 2011



## Saints, Preserve Us!

by Larry Moffet, Senior Pastor

Some of our students went to a psychology conference in Kansas where new research was presented by a scholar from South Africa who now teaches at Kansas State. He said that “Flow,” studied in psychology of sports, is also possible in our work life and in our service life.

“Flow” is sometimes it is called the “Zone.” He defines it as “operating at full capacity with intense engagement and seemingly effortless action. Involvement in the task is such that behavior becomes automatic and spontaneous. There is little awareness of self other than what one is doing.” The research of Dr. Clive Fullagar indicates that Flow happens when skills we have match the challenges we face. When they don’t, anxiety takes over.

Discussion with a psychology student quickly moved to this observation: how often do we ever truly have the skills we need to meet the challenges we face?

Life has great challenges. There are so many things that we could do, many things we feel we must do. Some well beyond our ability, it seems. Can we hope to experience this “Flow?”

Enter the Saints. A scripture in Hebrews says *(Hebrews 12:1)*

**Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,  
let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.**

I believe there is a way those who have lived here and others who live here with us now do encourage us. They Nudge us into the “Flow;” they add to our “skill set.” As the hymn we sang says, *We feebly struggle, they in glory shine* – and are shining strength and even skill-power upon us.

It is possible for us to make a difference far beyond our wildest hopes. That is when “Flow” takes over. Sometimes we don’t know it is happening. We might even be in the middle of a “Flow” time and not realize it until hours, weeks, or years later. Someone might ask “how did you do that?” or “How did you care for your loved one so well, so long?” We reply, “I don’t know I just did it.” Yes...,and you were part of “Flow.”

We do become far more than our own skills, our own hopes, our own energy.

**A generation or two ago a common phrase was “Saints, preserve us!” It usually expressed surprise, disbelief, or the need for a little extra help. Sometimes people said “Heaven help us!” Same thing.**

Guess what: that great cloud of witnesses is helping us, is Nudging us.

My mother is a very practical person. Somehow she has developed a whole Theology of Angels. She will often ask me:

**Are you letting your angels help you?**

**Have you let them know you’re glad they are around? Tell them!**

**When you ask them for help, they like it.**

**They also like appreciation. The need to know that you know they’re there.**

She would be the first to say that if something bad happens it is not because you didn’t ask the angels in the right way. They’re on duty no matter what. She adds, “I am trying to stay open to what is the whole truth of the thing.”

**For me, knowing the stories of some of those who have gone before us, the Saints, helps me accept the Nudge into Spirit-Life.**

**For you the Nudge into the Flow might come from the Spirit,  
or from Jesus himself. It is all good.**

Last week we talked about our ultimate loyalty belonging to God.  
**Today we can say why: No matter what skills we need for challenges ahead of us, God is there, meeting us with generosity.**

That is the whole of the Gospel: Jesus begins his teaching, his Sermon on the Mount letting the people then and us now know that life is full of blessing, even when it does not seem to be so.

**Christ is behind the Nudge – the Nudge from Saints preserving us, the angels guiding us, and the Spirit empowering us.  
With all this, our skills do become equal to the challenges we face.**

Back to the scholarly work on Flow. Notice how closely the work correlates with faith language about the way Saints, Angels, the Spirit Nudge us and empower us to become more than we are.

“When one is in the Flow, there is a sense of exercising control without having to try and be in control,. That is termed the *paradox of control*. People in flow report they feel in control but as soon as their attention shifts to trying to maintain control they lose the sense of flow. In Flow:

- There is a *loss of self-consciousness* as all concern for self disappears and the person becomes one with the activity.
- There is a *transformation of time* that seems to occur in which there is loss of time awareness.

Jesus wanted first followers to know that they were surrounded by a Flow of blessedness. He wants the same for you and for me.

<sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
    **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

<sup>4</sup>“Blessed are those who mourn,  
    **for they will be comforted.**

<sup>5</sup>“Blessed are the meek,  
    **for they will inherit the earth.**

<sup>6</sup>“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
    **for they will be filled.**

<sup>7</sup>“Blessed are the merciful,  
    **for they will receive mercy.**

<sup>8</sup>“Blessed are the pure in heart,  
    **for they will see God.**

<sup>9</sup>“Blessed are the peacemakers,  
    **for they will be called children of God.**

When blessedness flows as mercy, it participates in the law of spiritual abundance, which we have been focusing on in this Season of Generosity.

- It is why we give thanks. It is why we look ahead to the future
- It is why we generously work to make this congregation strong by offering out Time, Talents and Treasure.
- It is our way of participating in the blessedness that links all of Heaven and Earth.

As we become aware of this blessedness we do let heaven and earth help us... the Saints do preserve us. Christ does lead us.

**<sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God’s children now;  
what we will be has not yet been revealed.  
What we do know is this; when Christ is revealed,  
we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.**

### EPISTLE SCRIPTURE 1 JOHN 3:1-3

See what love our God has given us,  
that we should be called children of God;  
and that is what we are.

The reason the world does not know us  
is that it did not know God.

<sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God’s children now;  
what we will be has not yet been revealed.  
What we do know is this; when Christ is revealed,  
we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

\***GOSPEL SCRIPTURE MATTHEW 5:1-12** When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>He began to speak, teaching them, saying:

<sup>3</sup>”Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

<sup>4</sup>”Blessed are those who mourn,  
**for they will be comforted.**

<sup>5</sup>”Blessed are the meek,  
**for they will inherit the earth.**

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**for they will be filled.**

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<sup>8</sup>”Blessed are the pure in heart, **for they will see God.**

<sup>9</sup>”Blessed are the peacemakers, **for they will be called children of God.**

<sup>10</sup>”Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,  
**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

<sup>11</sup>”Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, **for your reward is great in heaven;**  
in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

*Clive J. Fullagar and E. Kevin Kelloway co-authored the report of research on Flow. Clive teaches psychology at Kansas State University.*