

VIVA LA VIDA

Week #1 of the 5-Week Series, "The Songs of Life"

Oct. 11, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center's Sunday virtual worship celebration. So glad you're joining us!

As many of you know or have heard, is that we also have a LIVE version at 9 a.m. outside on the event lawn, like we do for Easter! We've had a service already, and it's been great – well attended. And you are more than welcome to attend! A great way to stay safe and social distanced, and also be together at the same time, and enjoy our worship experience.

We have two important and wonderful events coming up. One more week left to sign up for our annual "Circles of Gratitude." You can do a Zoom virtual version; you can also sign up to do one in the Petersen Grove and, of course, socially spaced there. But that one will be live. You can check out those details on the website.

Also, for our kids we have a very 100% safe "Drive-Through Halloween Carnival" coming up on October the 24th. And you can check out details on that on our website calendar, as well.

So a lot of good things starting to crank up here at our ministry, and all being done safely! Right now we are going to enter a time of prayer and meditation led by Rev. Lori. And to lead us into that, we will now listen to our choir sing "Surely the Presence."

Unity Choir (singing remotely):

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place;
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.
I can feel the brush of angel's wings;
I see glory on each face.
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to join me in a time of prayer and meditation as we close our outer eyes, take in a deep, cleansing breath, and release it slowly. And take in another mindful breath, releasing any busy-ness we've had so far today. Just gently letting it go. Recognizing that the presence of God is right here, right now: in us and as us and through us. In our hearts and in our minds, lifting us up. Bringing forth abundant joy. Allowing us to live lives filled with peace.

In the quietness of our hearts, we feel our oneness with each other and all of humanity. And in this time in the outer, when things seem to be a little upset, when we go within, we feel that peace that passes understanding. When we go within to that quiet, still place, we recognize our true greatness. That which we came here to do: God guides us every step of the way. First one step, then another, as we came here to be the divine spiritual beings that we truly are: loving ourselves, loving each other unconditionally.

In this quiet, still place, we let go of anything less than God's perfect peace. In this quiet place, we are one with the All of the Universe. And we feel every cell in our body being revitalized, regenerated and brought to perfect wholeness: for wholeness is our birthright.

In these quiet moments, we feel the peace of the Living God in our very hearts. We know that we can access divine ideas for creating new and wonderful things in our lives. New ways of being. New ways of

loving. New ways of enjoying and sharing the prosperity that is ours for the asking. Jesus said whatever we ask for, we will receive.

And so, God, we open our minds and hearts to your greatness, to your prosperity, to your love, to your joy, to your peace. And so we take just a few moments to move more deeply into the silence, where we feel God's abiding peace at depth.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time together. For prayer and meditation that connects us more fully with the Divine. For each and every blessings; we have too many to count! And for this we are grateful. And so we thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

SONG

Sean Mullaney: "Viva La Vida" (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

I used to rule the world
Seas would rise when I gave the word
Now in the morning I sleep alone
Sweep the streets I used to own

I used to roll the dice
Feel the fear in my enemy's eyes
Listened as the crowd would sing,
"Now the old king is dead! Long live the king!"
One minute I held the keys
Next the walls were closed on me
I discovered that my castles stand
Upon pillars of salt and pillars of sand

Hear Jerusalem bells a-ringing
Roman cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror and my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
Once you'd gone there was never
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world

It was a wicked and wild wind
Blew down the doors to let me in
Shattered windows and the sound of drums
People couldn't believe what I'd become
Revolutionaries wait
For my head on a silver plate
Just a puppet on a lonely string
Ah, who would ever want to be king?

Hear Jerusalem bells a-ringing
Roman cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield

Missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
I know St. Peter won't call my name
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world

Whoa, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh

Hear Jerusalem bells a-ringing
Roman cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield
Missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
I know St. Peter won't call my name
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world

[Light applause]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj *[clapping]*: Thank you, Sean! That was absolutely fabulous! Absolutely fabulous! Really, really appreciate it! Good, good, good stuff!

So wouldn't it be cool if you ruled the world? Could you imagine having so much power and authority to be able to just say the word, and the rain would fall or the wind would blow? Or just say the word, and the sun would rise and the seas would calm? I mean, could you imagine having the power that you would know that anything you said or anything you asked for would be done? And everyone would follow your command and fulfill your very wishes?

Wouldn't it be cool if you were a king? Wouldn't it be cool if you had that much power?

You know, it kind of reminds me of this local bar that had a bartender that they thought was the most powerful and strong bartender in the world. And they had this ongoing bet for \$1,000. And what they would do is: the bartender would squeeze a lemon and put all the juice in a glass, and then hand it to someone. And then, if they could even squeeze one drop out after the strong bartender squeezed out the juice, they would win the \$1,000. And lots and lots of people tried! I mean, firemen; longshoremen; lumberjacks. Everybody tried; nobody could do it. And one day, this scrawny, geeky guy walks in with a pencil protector and thick glasses and a polyester suit, and asked if he could try it. Well, everyone in the bar just started laughing uproariously, because they knew he didn't have a chance, when all the other guys couldn't do it. And so the bartender grabbed the lemon and squeezed all the juice into the glass, and then handed the wrinkly rind to the skinny guy. And suddenly, everything went quiet when they actually saw not only one drop drop from the little guy squeezing it, but six drops! Then they went wild; they were cheering! The bartender gave the \$1,000 to the skinny guy, and he said, "*Hey! What's up with that? How did you do that? Are you a longshoreman? What do you do for a living?*" And he said, "*Naw, I don't do any of those things. I work for the IRS.*" *[Laughs]*

That's a lot of power! That's a lot of power!

So today we begin a five-week series on our annual "Songs of Life" series. And this is a really popular thing, and I love doing this, because we all love music. Every one of us has special songs that have touched us, or uplift us, or help guide us through difficult times. Or maybe help us reflect on beautiful moments and memories: things that soothe us and calm us. Things that excite us and uplift us and make

us feel powerful. And so, today, we are beginning by looking at a song from 2008 by Coldplay called “Viva La Vida.” It actually won the Grammy for the “Song of the Year.” And I love many things about this song! And one of them is how worldly the song is! Because its title is Spanish. And it was inspired by a king from the French Revolution. And a Mexican artist. It was written by a British band. And then heard and enjoyed by a Trinidadian/Canadian/American minister, who loved it so much he wrote a talk today to share with you: all the wonderful people in Phoenix – and parts beyond – to gain some lessons in how we can live and learn from this wonderful song, and the great gift and message it gives us.

Now, this song, in short, is really about a king that loses his kingdom. A king that kind of falls from grace and loses his power and is dethroned. And it is told from the perspective of the king.

And so let me just read you some of the lyrics to give you an idea of the narrative of what that experience is like from him: going from being the king to actually losing his power. And so the lyrics begin:

*I used to rule the world
Seas would rise when I gave the word
Now in the morning I sleep alone
Sweep the streets I used to own*

*One minute I held the key
Next the walls were closed on me ...*

*Revolutionaries wait
For my head on a silver plate*

As you can tell, this king is not having a great day! His reign is being “rained on” by a lot of negativity. And it really just describes him from going from being on top of the world to hitting rock bottom. You know, it describes him going from being the king to nothing; from being powerful to powerless.

So, you ever had a time in your life where you were on top of your game? Where things were going great in every way? And then, suddenly, everything just seemed to fall? The bottom just fell out of everything? You know, maybe you were in love, and thought this was the greatest thing ... and then, somehow, you guys broke up and things didn’t work out. Or maybe things were going great in your family, and then suddenly there was conflict, and then people aren’t talking to each other. Maybe business was booming and you were feeling so much joy – so healthy and vibrant. And then things changed, and all for the worst.

You know, the description that he is mentioning about this fall; there are things that we all experience in our life. And the worst part of it that he feels is realizing that the people who loved him and supported him suddenly have turned against him. The people he thought would be there for him are suddenly pulled away or drawn back. Or, actually, are just now against him.

And so, then the lyrics get even worse! And it says:

*Just a puppet on a lonely string
Ah, who would ever want to be king?*

And so he’s feeling so sad, so bad, so alone. He’s thinking, “*Who would want a life like this? Who would sign up for this?*” And he is really reflecting the famous words in a play by Shakespeare – I think it was *Henry IV* – these famous lines that say: “*Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.*”

What it's really point out is: being a leader isn't easy. Leading people and making decisions and ruling is not an easy thing. Because everybody won't agree. You know, they won't like all your decision. All the demands that are constantly there are very stressful and difficult.

And we can all relate to this, because it isn't just kings and leaders! Parents. You know, employers, employees. We all experience that level of stress, where life just isn't easy. And this is the point: This song doesn't sound like a happy song; it sounds like a "somebody-done-somebody-wrong" song. And even though he's down right now, as the chorus picks up, you can feel the energy and the vibration pick up a little bit. And the chorus says this:

*I hear Jerusalem bells a-ringing
Roman cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field*

And what this part does is: it acknowledges the resources and powers that he has. That he has the power of the military, and he has the power and the support of God. You know, back then there was a belief that kings were divinely ordained by God. They got their authority from God. And so his role is ordained from God; he's got the power of the military. I mean, he's got a lot of good stuff going for him. Bells are ringing; choirs are singing!

And then the next two lines come. And while they sound very negative, and sound very strange, I think they are the two most important lines in the song, that make this song from hopeless to hopeful; from powerless to powerful. I think it is inspiring and uplifting. And these are the two lines:

*For some reason I can't explain
I know St. Peter won't call my name
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world*

I know; those don't sound inspiring! And they don't sound hopeful! But when you unpack the layers of what it actually means, it's a very inspiring – very, very inspiring! – song. And if I had to pick a word of what I would say this song is about: it is about redemption. It is a song of hope, of transformation.

Anybody ever have a time where you just messed up big? Where you really, really didn't do a good job? But you knew you had better in you? You knew you could do better! You knew you could rise above! You knew could succeed, even though you made some mistakes, and even though you messed up.

And that's what I think the theme of this song is about. And so let's look at some of these lines:

*For some reason I can't explain
I know St. Peter won't call my name*

He's saying: "For some reason, I don't think I'm getting into heaven! For some reason, I don't think I'll experience the kingdom of heaven. For some reason, I'm being rejected by God. For some reason, I won't feel God's peace." And I always think: what's that mean? "For some reason I can't explain?" I mean, after having the power of the military and the power of God, for some reason you can't explain why you don't feel like you're going to have more good? Or experience the kingdom of heaven?

And here's what I think that line means: "For some reason I can't explain." It is really a line that is saying that I'm pretending that I don't know what's really going on. You ever heard or said something like, "You know, for some reason, I'm feeling kind of sad and down today, but I don't know why"? "For some

reason, I'm feeling a little angry and agitated, but I don't know why." You know what that's really saying? Is that deep down I really know, but I just don't want to admit what I'm really feeling, or what's really going on.

Sometimes we use that – *"For some reason that's going on..."* – it's because we don't want to look deeper at the pain or the shame, or to realize: *"Maybe I blew it."* Or, *"I did something that I feel ashamed about."* You know, *"Maybe I'm not a good leader at all. Maybe too much responsibility scares me."*

So that *"For some reason I can't explain..."* is a way that we sometimes hide. But in the next line, he gets more truthful, and he said:

*Never an honest word
But that's when I ruled the world*

And he's getting to a place where he realized that there were promises he didn't fulfill that he made to the people. There were lies that he told. There were times that he didn't act in their best interest or be considerate of them. You know, he wasn't impeccable with his word; he did not live in an integrous way. And at some point – this is a moment of vulnerability and honesty. When he's getting truthful that he didn't put his best into this. That he was not the best leader. He was not giving of himself in the best way. And so he feels unworthy. He feels like, *"No; St. Peter won't call my name. I didn't do a good job. I messed up."*

And so, this is first step of redemption. And you know what it is? It is responsibility. It is looking at our lives, and the situation we're in, and realizing, *"I made some mistakes. There's some things that I'm not really doing very well. I'm not putting forth the very best of myself."*

And one of the things that he's coming to an understanding that he didn't do, in being honest, is that he turned to his military: to the outer power. But he didn't turn to his spiritual power. He was glad to be "God-ordained leader," but he wasn't turning to God. He wasn't doing what Scripture said of: *"Seek ye first... and all these things will be added unto you."* He didn't seek the spiritual wisdom; he didn't seek that guidance. And so it cost him.

You know, everybody always wants to succeed, but everybody's not always willing to look at themselves and see what it is that they're doing that might be causing the issues. Sometimes we want to blame all the outside, and not take responsibility – which is not about blame – but it's about being responsible. And being willing to respond to the mistakes we've made. But first we've got to own it, face it, admit it, and be responsible for it.

The second point of redemption I'm going to introduce by telling you a little story about this painter named Bob, who always thinned his paint to stretch out and make more profits. And after a lot of deferred maintenance, there was a church in the area that wanted him to paint it. So he bid really low so he would get the job, and he'd make some money. And he thinned the paint as he usually did. So he's painting and painting in all the high areas; in all the scaffolding areas. He's way up there. And then he hears a thunder crack, and then it starts pouring rain. So the rain is pouring, and it's washing this thin, cheap paint off of the church. And there are puddles all over the place. And then he slips off the scaffolding and lands on the grass in a puddle of this. And he knew that this was a sign from God. So immediately, he gets on his knees and he begs: *"God, God! Please forgive me? Please, please forgive me! What can I do?"* And then there's a crack of thunder, and a big voice says, *"Repaint! Repaint and thin no more!"* [Laughs and simulates a "rim shot" drum roll]

So the second point of redemption, after responsibility, is to repent. And you know what repent means? It means to rethink. To rethink how we're living our lives.

Remember when God said, "Go and sin no more"? What he was saying is: Go and stop doing things that are hurting yourself. Go and stop doing things that are hurting your relationship. Go and stop doing things that are hurting your health. There are so many things we do that aren't good or healthy or positive for us! You know, we know they're not good, and yet we keep doing them! Whether it's smoking or overeating or eating unhealthy or not exercising. Or beating ourselves up and saying negative things and putting ourselves down all the time. You know, maybe it's in arguments you have in relationships, sometimes calling each other names. Those things don't do well, and yet we keep doing some of these things.

So the whole idea to repent and rethink and to "go and sin no more," is to look at our lives: at the negative patterns and behaviors and actions we're doing. And to just stop doing them! Just stop! Stop putting ourselves down. Stop complaining. Stop cheating or lying or being so angry and agitated. Stop flipping people off on the highway! I mean, stop all the things we think aren't a big deal! But these things actually get in the way of our peace and our happiness and success. Sometimes we're so quick and ready to go forward and be successful, and sometimes it's just a matter of pulling back and just stopping some of the not-so-healthy things we're doing.

You know, one example I've given many times, but it's so powerful I like to give it: Is that they say the best way to improve your relationship is stop complaining about each other. And just stopping complaining about each other literally raise the vibration and the energy and the harmony in the relationship. By stopping doing things that are not healthy or not good for us, that it actually improves our lives and brings us closer to redemption ... which means to make things better.

So think of one thing in your life that's a negative pattern – that's unhealthy – that you know if you stopped it today, it would make a positive benefit in your life.

So redemption requires responsibility – owning it and facing it. It requires repenting – and that is to stop doing it. (Whatever negative pattern.) And the third thing we're going to talk about is revolution. The redemption requires responsibility, repentance and revolution.

Now, a revolution is about a change or transformation for the better. Now, we always think about revolutions of a political overthrow: changing the government. But there are revolutions of our mind! You know, to revolutionize the way we think. To revolutionize the way we show up. You can revolutionize your confidence. You can revolutionize your passion. You can revolutionize how you do business. Like, to revolutionize means to take something and just make a quantum leap in your consciousness of how you choose to show up in your life.

Like, I knew somebody, and his name was Joe. And he was unemployed and, yet, every morning he would get up, put on his best suit, look at himself in the mirror, and say, "*You are a success, Joe! You are prosperous! You make a positive difference, and you'd be a great asset in anyone's company! They hiring you will make them succeed and make you succeed!*" And he would get up every single day – even while he was looking for a job, even when he didn't have to – because he put on the consciousness of someone of great success. He revolutionized himself inwardly, and then the outward success ended up showing, as well.

You know, just seeking God spiritually daily could revolutionize our consciousness and our lives. Being someone who is committed to being compassionate and kind to people every day – revolutionizing how we show up – will change our lives in great ways.

I met someone last week who said, *“If something isn’t right, and someone calls me at 11 o’clock at night, I will make sure by 9 a.m. everything’s okay.”* And I loved her attitude! It was like: She’s got this “can do” attitude that everything’s possible, and we can make it work, if we’re willing to try, and to compromise, and try and figure out and be creative. To just revolutionize how we think – how we show up in life – absolutely will make a huge, huge difference.

And so, how many of you have heard of Freda Kahlo? The Mexican artist? Famous for her self-portraits and some aspects of nature, as well as Mexican artifacts. Now, when she was a child, she had a very, very sad childhood. Did not have a healthy relationship with her mom. At six, she contracted polio, and her right leg was thinner and shorter than the other leg. It was painful, and not easy for her. She ended up getting bullied a lot. She was isolated at home a lot, and then when she did get out, she was bullied a lot. If it wasn’t for her dad, who taught her photography and was really understanding and compassionate, she would have had a horrible childhood. When she did go to school, she got expelled. She also experienced being sexually abused. So she really, really had a tough time.

When she started finding herself, she went to a national preparatory school, and she was going to become a doctor. Her grades were great. And then she got into this horrible bus accident that literally punctured her pelvis. It broke three vertebrae; it broke her collarbone. I mean, all kinds of things. She spent three months in the hospital, and had severe pain for the rest of her life.

And she could have stayed down ... But what she started doing – you know, because her career: everything had changed, and she’s having health issues – she started loving to paint. She was really, really self-taught in painting. And maybe some of the photography influence from her dad helped give her perspective. But she painted some incredible paintings, became very successful. And the very last painting she painted was a painting of these watermelons that were fresh and delicious and was colorful. And it looks so lively and so good! And then, eight days. She painted it, and left it untitled. Eight days before she died – at the age of 47 – in 1954 she named that painting of those fresh, bright, wonderful watermelons. And she named it *“Viva La Vida.”*

And the thing I love about that is that she revolutionized her mindset: from sickly, from the accident, from having to change her life. She revolutionized her mind that it would succeed. That it would contribute. She got involved in political activism, social justice. I mean, she didn’t just stay to herself. She could have just stayed home along with all the pain and the injuries, but she put it out there, and revolutionized herself, and literally transformed the view of women, women artists. I mean, really, really powerful stuff.

Well, a guy named Chris Martin, many years later, saw that painting of *“Viva La Vida,”* and named this song – his song that he wrote about the king and the revolution – he named it *“Viva La Vida,”* which means love live life. And I think that is just a powerful thing!

And so the question for you is: What area of your life do you want to revolutionize? And are you willing to first start with an inner revolution? Of revolutionizing your consciousness? Because two things come to mind. When Scripture says, *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind,”* it could be, *“Be transformed by having an inner revolution of the mind.”*

And then a quote from an Italian playwright, who said, *"I am, indeed, a king. Because I know how to rule myself."*

And, to me, that's what it comes down to: How well are you ruling yourself? Because your kingdom is your mind! And how well we rule our attitude, our outlook, our mindset, our perspective, our thoughts, our words, our intentions and our vision will literally determine the quality of our life, no matter what things are going around us.

And the fact is, we all make mistakes. We all mess up. We all aren't as good of leaders as we want to be and intend to be. But redemption is possible. Redemption, meaning that we can make things better. We can make ourselves better. And it just take these three things: Being responsible for where you are, and owning and having honesty with yourself of where you are and what you've done. Repenting: looking at things and realizing, *"These things are not healthy; I need to stop doing those things."* And then, third, revolutionize your consciousness and your mind, and it will change and transform your life in an amazing way. And those are the lessons for living in the wonderful song, "Viva La Vida."

God bless you all!

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. We're so grateful to those of you who have sent in your checks and are giving online. You're keeping all the great and wonderful things we do at Unity of Phoenix going.

And so I invite you to take your offering in your hand, and affirm with me our offering blessing: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive."* And so we say thank you, Mother/Father God, for these gifts, these tithes and these offerings. We know they are given in love; they are received in love; and that they move through this ministry with the energy of divine love out into the world as good. And that each giver is blessed: heaped up, pressed down and overflowing, for that is the Law. And so it is. Thank you, God! Amen.

CLOSING

Rev. Lori Fleming: Well, we're so grateful you could be with us online! We are having services out on the lawn Sunday morning at 9 o'clock, but we know all of you can't make that. So we're really glad that we can provide these online videos for you.

And now will you listen as we the choir sings the Peace Song?

Unity Choir (singing remotely):

Let there be peace on Earth;

And let it begin with me.

Let there be peace on Earth;

The peace that was meant to be.

With God as Creator,

Fam'ly all are we.

Let us walk with each other

In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me,

Let this be the moment now.

With ev'ry step I take,

Let this be my joyous vow:
To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally.

Let there be peace on Earth;
And let it begin with me!

Rev. Lori Fleming: Will you join me in the Prayer for Protection?

The light of God surrounds us;
The love of God enfolds us;
The power of God protects us;
The presence of God watches over us.
Wherever we are, God is.

Have a blessed day! Thank you!

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