

RISE UP - Inspired by the Andra Day song
Week #4 of the 5-Week Series, "The Songs of Life"
Nov. 1, 2020
Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center's Sunday virtual worship celebration. I'm Rev. Richard Maraj, senior minister, and I'm so thrilled that you have joined us! So you all know the good news: that we are LIVE every Sunday at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. outside. It's safe; the weather is great! And we're socially distanced; we're wearing our masks. So if you haven't been out yet, I invite you to come out. It is a safe and wonderful experience of our worship services. And if you aren't yet, we will continue to post these recorded services online for your enjoyment, as well.

We're going to jump right in right now with our meditation from Rev. Lori. And to lead us into that experience, we will now listen to the choir as they 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. Take in another mindful breath, and let go of any busy-ness we've had so far today. Just gently release it; let it go as we begin to move our awareness within: into that quiet, still space within the very depths of our soul. To that place of peace. To the silence. And to the stillness of the center of our being. To that place where we are one with the Divine.

In this quiet, still place filled with God's grace, urging us forward into our higher good. Guiding us with spiritual intuition to the next right and perfect step. To move forward. To be closer to the God within. As we begin to know God more fully – as that Spirit that's in us and as us and through us – that lifts us up out of the old. Letting go of everything that no longer serves us, so we can rise up into a higher consciousness. Into a more spiritual way of doing and being. Remembering that we've come here to be God's hands and feet; to bring more good into the world.

As we become more compassionate and loving, the world becomes more compassionate and loving. And so we feel God's compassion well up within us as a spring of living water, flooding with the divine consciousness of compassion and love and peace and joy and prosperity that are our birthright. And we revel in these God qualities; we manifest them in the world, because it's who we came to be.

In this season of Thanksgiving, we're grateful for everything that has happened to us: the good and everything else, knowing that each lesson along the way has brought us to this place. To this understanding. To this knowing that we are God's beloved. That we were created good. And that we've come here to fulfill what Jesus taught: to love God, and to love each other.

And so, as we move more deeply into the silence, we remember to count all of our blessings.

SILENCE

And so, sweet Spirit, we say thank you for it all! Thank you for the good that we have in our lives: for the prosperity that is coming to us each and every day in each and every way. We are truly blessed! And for

this – and all the good we have in our lives – we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!
And it is so. Amen.

SONG

Charity Lockhart: "Rise Up" (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

You're broken down and tired
Of living life on a merry-go-round
And you can't find the fighter
But I see it in you so we're gonna walk it out
And move mountains
We're gonna walk it out
And move mountains

And I'll rise up
Rise like the day
I'll rise up
I'll rise unafraid
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again

And I'll rise up
High like the waves
I'll rise up
In spite of the ache
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again
For you, for you, for you ...

When the silence isn't quiet
And it feels like it's getting hard to breathe
And I know you feel like dying
But I promise we'll take the world to its knees
And move mountains
Bring it to its feet
And move mountains

And I'll rise up
Rise like the day
I'll rise up
I'll rise unafraid
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again
For you, for you, for you ...

All we need, all we need is hope
And for that we have each other
And for that we have each other, yeah
We will rise
We will rise

We will rise, ohh ohhh
We will rise

I'll rise up
Rise like the day
I'll rise up
In spite of the ache
I will rise a thousand times again

And we'll rise up
High like the waves
We'll rise up
In spite of the ache
We'll rise up
Again and again, and again and again
For you, for you, for you, for you ...
For you, for you, for you, for you ...

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj [clapping]: Thank you, Charity! That was awesome! That was absolutely fabulous!
Thank you!

So have you ever felt like giving up? Have you ever had a time in your life where you felt like you didn't have it in you to face and handle some big problem? Or you didn't have what it takes to fulfill your dream, to reach your goals, and to create the kind of life that you want?

You know, if we are having struggles... if we are having frustrations and problems and difficulties... If you have ever, ever doubted yourself or lived in a moment of fear... you know what that means? It means you're alive! It means you are alive! In fact, it means that you are abundantly alive.

You know, Jesus said he came that we may have life, and have it more abundantly. Which means to have a more richer, a more meaningful, and a more fulfilling experience of life. He also said these words: "*In this life there will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer: for I have overcome the world.*" What he was saying is that we're going to experience trials and tribulations. That means that struggles and difficulty and adversity is just a part of the human curriculum. It's a part of our life journey. It is a part of our spiritual path.

But then he says, "*Be of good cheer.*" And to be of good cheer means: Don't get weighed down. Don't get frustrated. Don't get upset. That, actually, you can brighten up, because we have the power to overcome! We have the resources; we have the ability to succeed, to transform and to transcend the problems and difficulties that we experience in our life. Because the truth is that we are powerful, we are amazing, and we are resilient. But sometimes we forget that we are! And sometimes we need reminders to know that we can overcome; that we can get by and make it through any difficult road that comes up in our lives.

And three things that help us – help remind us of our power: that we are amazing, that we are resilient... The first one is: the Bible tells us over and over again. It says that you are created in the image and likeness of God. That you are the temple of the Living God. That you are the light of the world. That the kingdom of God is within you. That, if you believe, that you shall do the things that Jesus has done, and even greater things than these. And, finally, I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

It tells us over and over again that **WE ARE POWERFUL, WE ARE AMAZING, and WE ARE RESILIENT.**

The second thing that kind of reminds us, when we forget how great we are, is inspirational stories, inspirational quotes, amazing speakers and affirmations. All these things actually uplift us and help us remember who we are. Did you know that the global industry of personal development and growth – that, in 2019, we spent \$38.8 billion dollars on inspirational and motivational materials: tapes, books, all the different things. And that is because we hunger inside to be reminded of the truth of who we are. We hunger to remember that we can overcome, that we have the resources, the strength, the drive and the determination to overcome whatever is in our way.

And the third thing that reminds us who we are are songs. Songs help us remember that we are powerful, that we are amazing, that life is good. And whether those songs are “I Will Survive” or “I’m Still Standing” or “Don’t Stop Believing” or “My Way” – or whatever it is! – I’m sure we all have a song or two that reminds us that we can keep going. That we really do have what it takes.

And so the whole thing of all those are to help do what Mufasa said in *The Lion King*: is to remember who you are. To remember our power. To remember our ability. To remember our beauty. To remember our strength and our resilience. And to remember that we all have the power to rise up!

So today we are in the fourth of our five-week series – our “Songs of Life” series – where we’re using inspirational songs to really teach us how to live our lives in more joyful and loving and positive ways. We’ve looked at a couple of songs from Coldplay; last week we looked at a song from George Michael. And today Andra Day’s inspirational song, “Rise Up,” is the focus.

The thing is, she wrote this song. And she wrote “Rise Up” for two reasons. One: She was kind of struggling in her own life: her personal life; her singing career. And she had some odd jobs, but really wasn’t getting any breaks, and things weren’t going as well as she hoped. The second reason she wrote it is: A dear friend of hers got cancer. And she wrote it, actually, as a prayer and affirmation to her friend and herself to be able to rise up. To move beyond it, and be able to handle these tough situations.

You know, she said when she wrote it, she got up and started singing it, and most of it just came through her on the first freestyle recording. And she said, “*Honestly, there are lines in there that I normally find cliché; but sometimes, a good cliché is exactly what you need in a moment of hopelessness.*”

So let’s just look at the chorus, and listen to the words of the chorus from “Rise Up”:

*And I'll rise up
I'll rise like the day
I'll rise up
I'll rise unafraid
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again*

*And I'll rise up
High like the waves
I'll rise up
In spite of the ache
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again*

I think it’s hard not to be moved and inspired just hearing those words. Because I guarantee: Every single one of us has some area in our life right now that isn’t working as well. That isn’t shining as bright. That isn’t improving. Maybe more worn down and a little weary. And just hearing those words give us some hope. Give us some positive direction. And give us some inspiration.

So we really can rise up! So what are the things we need to do to live that way?

And the first one is to **DISCOVER THE POWER OF HOPE**. I believe everything – every transformation, every healing, everything – begins with hope. Martin Luther King once said this. He said, “*If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving. You lose the courage to be: that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all.*” Without hope, you know, we wouldn’t dream. Without hope, we wouldn’t believe. Without hope, we wouldn’t feel we had what it takes to overcome. Without hope, I don’t even know if we’d even get out of bed, because we would believe that life won’t get any better than this.

Hope is the absolute belief that things can get better. It is the belief that things will get better. It doesn’t mean you know how it’s going to happen; you just open a space to believe that improvement, that transformation, that change and betterment is absolutely possible.

And we demonstrate hope in a range of different ways. It could be a student hoping to get an “A.” It could be somebody who’s got cancer hoping for remission. It could be someone who feels alone hoping to attract a fulfilling relationship. It could be someone in a family hoping for healing of the conflict and hoping for reconciliation. To me, hope is an uplifting, energizing, faith-filled energy that opens our hearts and minds to greater possibilities: for the possibilities of wonderful and better things.

Les Brown has a quote that I love. And he says, “*When life knocks you down, make sure you land on your back. Because if you can look up, you can get up!*” [Laughs] That’s what the essence of hope is!

So I ask you: Where in your life could you infuse a bit of hope? Is it a hope for healing? A hope for reconciliation? Is it a hope for peace? Is it a hope for recovery? Is it a hope for abundance? Is it a hope for success? Is it a hope for clarity? Whatever it is, infusing it with hope is the beginning of possibilities! Infusing it with hope is the possibility of transformation. And infusing it with hope is the beginning of us rising up.

So the second thing we need to do is to **USE THE POWER OF A POSITIVE MINDSET**. So there was this wise old Hindu teacher who was getting a little frustrated with one of his students who was always complaining about everything. Always seeing the negative and complaining about everything. And so the master wanted to teach him a lesson of how to see the difficulties and pain and frustrations in their life in a better perspective.

And so the master said, “*So I want you to take a handful of salt; I want you to pour it in that glass of water; and then I want you to take a sip.*” So the student grabs a handful of salt; pours it into the glass of water; has a sip; and spits it out immediately. And the master says, “*How’d that taste?*” And he said, “*Well, it’s horrible! It was bitter; it was an intensely bad taste!*” And the master said, “*Yup; that’s right.*”

He said, “*Now, let’s go down to the lake. And I want you to grab a hand of salt; take it with you; and drop it in.*” And so the guy gets a handful of salt; drops it into the lake. And the teacher says, “*Now, take up a scoop and just taste what the water tastes like.*” And so he takes up a scoop, and he says, “*Well, it tastes fresh! It tastes fine; it tastes really good. So what’s the point?*”

And the master says this. He said, “*The pain of life is pure salt, no more and no less. The amount of pain in life remains the same. However, the amount of bitterness we taste depends on the container that we put that pain in.*” And so what he’s saying is that, when you put pain in a limited, small consciousness, it can be very painful. But when you expand your consciousness – to see the good; to see the possibilities; to see the blessings; and to still appreciate life and find joy – then the pain is less intense.

It kind of reminds of the Parable of the New Wine in Old Wineskins. The thing about a wineskin is: When it’s – when the process of wine is happening – the wineskin is stretched to the max. It’s inflexible; it is quite rigid. And so, if you put new wine in an old wineskin, it’s already stretched. And when the new wine stretches, it bursts, and you waste all the wine. And so the wineskin – an old wineskin – represents a consciousness that’s so inflexible that it can’t entertain new ideas. That you have to put new wine in

new wineskins so that it can expand. And it represents a consciousness that is flexible, that is open, that is willing to see greater possibilities, and not just stay rigid.

The singer, Lizzo, won *TIME Magazine's* "Entertainer of the Year" in 2019. And, in reading it – the article about it – it said that she really experienced a lot of obstacles. She had a nervous breakdown in 2018. She had her heart broken badly in a relationship. And she had struggled a lot with her weight and her body image and her self-acceptance and self-love for her life. She had to seek therapy. She had to go through a lot. But through the process, she says that she feels that her setbacks – and all the problems and difficulties – really helped her write deeper and better songs that touched people. And she said that learning to be honest with her therapy, and learning to be more vulnerable, helped her as a singer to be more open. And to be more honest, and to be more vulnerable.

Here's what she wrote: "*I needed that heartbreak experience. I'm not sad now, because I used the pain constructively. The pain is the human experience. I'm making music that hopefully makes other people feel good and makes me discover self-love.*" And I really love that! That is a mindset in which pain can thrive in. When you're willing to see the blessings – to see how it helps – and also to use it to help other people feel good. That's a key and vital part of the power of a positive mindset: when you can see the possibilities and the truth and the good and the blessings and the tings to appreciate and also see all of us ... that we are all one. That we are to help one another, to support one another. Because it's not just "I'll" rise up; it's that "We" will rise up. We need to each other to rise up! And in that consciousness of wholeness – in that consciousness of positivity and possibility – that we really will rise up! Because amazing things happen when we have an expanded consciousness.

And the way to expand it is to make sure that we bring God into that situation. That whatever conflict, whatever difficulty, whatever health issue, whatever financial issue – when you bring God in, and know that God means this for good: that this will bless me; that this will have a positive outcome, even if I can't see it now. When we have that mindset, that is the thing that helps us rise up. Because it opens the doors and channels or greater possibilities and goodness for all of us.

And the final thins is about **THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE**. Because we need perseverance to be able to rise up.

So there was this pastor, and he was having lunch in this restaurant. And he had just opened a letter from his mom in which it had \$20. And he was really happy, and he smiled and he thought, "*Wow! I could really use this money right now!*" So, just as he was finishing his meal, he saw through the window a man who looked very poor – who was really down on his luck – was leaning, sitting on the sidewalk, leaning up against a post. And he realized, "*You know, that man could probably use this money way more than I could.*" And so he wanted to give the man a little boost: a little help and some encouragement. So he took the envelope and scratched off the names and wrote in big letters: PERSEVERE with an exclamation point. And then he put the \$20 bill in the envelope. Then he went outside and he put the envelope next to the man, and he patted him on the shoulder and smiled at the man. And then he gave him a "thumbs up" of encouragement.

And so the man – when he left – opened it, saw the \$20, saw the word, "PERSEVERE." And so then the next day, the young pastor's having lunch in the place again. And the same man walks up to him and gives him a wad of bills. And the pastor said, "*What's this?*" He said, "*It's your half of the winnings from the hunch yesterday.*" He said, "*What hunch?*" He said, "*Persevere came in first in the fourth race of the racetrack and paid out 30 to one!*" [Laughs] Perseverance!

You know, *Forbes* magazine says that the most underrated ability that we need to succeed in business – and for all businesses to succeed – is perseverance. Because, at some point, we'll all get hit with little troubles or challenges in any business and any area of life! And perseverance is the thing that helps us push through. It is the thing that helps us hang on and move through. It is those moments of feeling like

giving up that we hang on, and we stay committed, and we stay true to our dream and do the work that we are meant to do.

Have you ever given up on something because it was too hard, too much work, or took too long a time? Perseverance is the thing! Because sometimes we say we want something, but we aren't really willing to do all the work. Perseverance is about hanging in there in those moments that are tough ... when the way isn't looking as clear as we'd like. It's about hanging in there, because breakthroughs can happen and do happen with perseverance.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the story of the hemorrhaging woman. And here's what it says: "*A woman who had a hemorrhage for 12 years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all she had, and had not been helped but, instead, became worse.*" So imagine that: for 12 years, you're bleeding. For 12 years, you're struggling. For 12 years, you're trying and seeking out physicians' help. You're paying out all your money. And not only are you not better, you're worse.

And what I love about this woman: So on that day – 12 years! – she heard Jesus is going to speak. And there'll be crowds around. And on that day, she still believed there was hope. There was possibility. And she was willing to go to touch the hem of his garment. And when she got there, there was a whole crowd around Jesus. And it said that she had to press through the crowd. I mean, some strength. She could have given up easily, and said, "*That's too crowded.*" But she kept pushing, kept pressing. And then, finally, touched the hem of his garment, and she was healed. And I love that story, because it is a story of hope, and a story of faith. It is a story of resilience, and a story of perseverance. And it is because of her perseverance that she was healed.

Sometimes it feels like it's taking forever. Or, "*Oh; it'll never come! It'll never happen!*" And perseverance is the thing that has us continue to believe, and to continue to hang in there, and keep doing the work. And, I mean, she is one of the great, great, great examples of that in the Bible.

An actor that I really like is Robert Downey, Jr. I like him, not only because he's a fabulous actor, but I love his story and all he's overcome to be where he is. His father was an actor, so he was acting since he was five years old. But also his father was a drug addict and, really, a drug abuser. At the age of six, his father was inviting Robert – little Robert, at six years old – to smoke marijuana with him. And here's what he said about that. He said, "*When my dad and I would do drugs together, it was like him trying to express his love for me in the only way that he knew how.*" I mean, and what a sad thing: that bonding through the pain of using drugs together.

It ended up starting Robert on a whole life of struggle with addiction, from drinking every night, calling people up trying to get drugs. The worst years were between '96 and 2001, when it was just a cycle of drug abuse, of arrests, or rehabs, relapse. Then more drug abuse, more arrests. I mean, it was a cycle. He had gotten fired from some jobs, including *Ally McBeal*, even though he was fabulous in it. And so all that struggle kept going on and on until he was in his 40's, which is still a lot of life for drug addiction.

He was drug-free since July of 2003. And he credits his wife, his family, therapy, meditation, The 12 Steps, yoga, and the practice of Kung Fu. And, when asked on Oprah how he did that, he said that the hardest thing was to make the decision. To actually commit himself to really doing it this time. To really mean it, and to persevere through all of it, because he was committed to actually making sure that that was not his life anymore.

And so Robert Downey, Jr. was voted – or actually was – the highest paid actor, I think, in 2014 and 2015. 2013-2015. I mean, he is phenomenal, from the *Sherlock Holmes* to the *Iron Man* ... I mean, all of those things. And it isn't the money; but, to me, it is the perseverance of hanging in there for so many years. Not giving up on his career. Not giving up on what he was good at. And having people in his life who didn't give up on him! To me, that's the triumph that makes me love and appreciate the work he

does. Because, of all the things he went through, to still be able to do it, and do it well. It was perseverance.

Andra Day, herself, was struggling for a long time: singing in little clubs, doing YouTube songs. And then one day she was playing a club in Malibu – in a coffeehouse – and the friend of Stevie Wonder's ex-wife heard her, and was so impressed with her: told Stevie's ex-wife, and then told Stevie. And then Stevie heard her sing, and was so impressed with her, he introduced her to a producer, who produced her first album. And, you know, the rest – as they say – is history. But if she didn't persevere, that would have never happened! It is because she kept hanging in there – kept singing and kept believing – that it happened.

You know, we can mess up for years and years and years. Or have illness for years and years and years. Or struggle in a career for years and years. We can have all kinds of things not go well. But if we persevere and hang on and hang in, amazing things can happen.

In Matthew... In the book of James, it says this: "*Count it all joy, brethren, when you face trials of many kinds, because the testing of your faith produces perseverance; let perseverance finish its work, so that you may be mature, complete and lacking in nothing.*"

It is perseverance that shapes our character. You know, that shapes our mind: that shapes our outlook on life. It is only through perseverance that we can really discover our strengths and abilities, and develop awareness and understanding and compassion and insights that help us be a better person. And to help us be better for other people in our lives.

You know, a part of living this life – and living it more abundantly – is how well we face the challenges and struggles and difficulties with being of good cheer. And the being of good cheer is to use the power of hope to know that things will get better. To use the power of a positive mindset that can see the good – that can see the lessons and the blessings – as well as knowing that we're all in this together. And, finally, the power of perseverance: to keep hanging in there. Because when we go through this, the spirit in us – and the power within us – will, as the song says, help us rise up.

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 checks, who have contributed online, who continue to support this ministry so that we can keep bringing you these online talks and services. And so I invite you to affirm our offering blessing with me: "*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, for these tithes and these offerings. We know they are given in love, and that 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, it's been great to be with you! We hope you've been blessed by our music and our message and our meditation! If you would like, you can listen to our choir sing 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: And now will you affirm the Prayer for Protection with me?
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. And all is well!

Have a blessed day!

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