

WHITE STONE CEREMONY

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Rev. Lori Fleming

Rev. Lori Fleming: Hello, everyone! I'm Rev. Lori Fleming, the pastoral care minister here at Unity of Phoenix, and it's my joy and pleasure to welcome you to our very first service here in 2021. Happy New Year to all of you!

And now will you join me in a time of prayer and meditation?

MEDITATION

As we close our outer eyes, and take in a deep, cleansing breath, and release it slowly. Quieting our minds. And take in another mindful breath. And as we release it, begin to move our awareness into our heart space: to that quiet, still place within. Into that place where we are one with God. In this brand new year, we have the opportunity to create a brand new life. As we let go of the old, and magnify the new, knowing that God is always here: guiding us, loving us unconditionally. In this quiet, still place, we feel the presence of the living God in us and as us and through us. And we know that God is a good and loving God. And that what we ask for, we receive.

And so we ask for our consciousness to be cleansed. To rise up out of the old. To experience new feelings of greater, deeper love for ourselves and for each other. Feeling more peaceful. Feeling more open to the unlimited possibilities that this new year has for us. We know that we are in our right and perfect place, and that there is something great for us to do. And we do it with joy and ease and grace, for it is why we are here.

And so we take just a few moments and move more deeply into the silence, where we feel the presence of God all around us.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time of spiritual communion. We know that we have many blessings. We are grateful for all of them! Thank you for creating us. Thank you for sustaining us. Thank you for loving us. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

MESSAGE

Well, Happy New Year, everyone! Did any of you make New Year's resolutions? How many of them have you kept? Yeah ... none! I decided to read more, so I turned on the subtitles on my TV! And I decided to stop procrastinating; I'm going to start tomorrow. And I was going to give up all my bad habits for New Year's ... but then I realized: nobody likes a quitter!

My husband, Mark, and I had a hard time deciding on what to wear on our "stay-at-home" New Year's Eve. So finally we decided: clean pajamas, which really wasn't any different than what we've been wearing the last 10 months as we've been working at home. Except for maybe the clean part!

I hope that the year 2021 brings peace, joy, love, health, wholeness and prosperity to you and yours. Today is our annual White Stone Ceremony. We'll do that at the end of my talk here. I'll guide you through it: tell you exactly what to do and how to do it.

The Ceremony was originally created by Rev. David Williamson, and it spread throughout the Unity movement. Many Unity churches do this on the first Sunday in January. The white stone is about creating a new name and a new nature for yourself, and I will explain that as we go through it. It starts with a Bible quotation from Revelations, Chapter 1, Verse 17. And it goes like this:

"Let everyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers will be given some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it."

So metaphysically, ears represent obedience and receptivity of mind. To have an obedient and receptive mind, we must first listen to Spirit using the ears of our soul within us. It isn't a physical ear, but the ear that hears the still, small voice within of the Holy Spirit as it gently whispers inside us. In order to develop this listening quality, we have to take that long, arduous journey of 18 inches from our head to our heart. It sounds simple, but it isn't always easy. And we do this with prayer and meditation. It's a practice: developed by doing it daily.

So let's look at the verse. The first part says: **"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."** As I said before, "ear" means obedience and receptivity of mind. It's telling us to sit in the silence and listen. To develop our spiritual ears of the soul that are within each and every one of us. And to wait for that still, small voice of Spirit guiding us to our greater good. To actively and willfully want a relationship with the God of our understanding. And then to follow this inner advice -- our innate intuition ...not thinking we know better. Spirit would never lead us astray!

The next part of the verse says: **"To everyone who conquers ..."** Now, I'm not talking about a holy war here; I'm not talking about guns and tanks and bombs and violence. I'm not talking about that at all. And I'm not talking about going after people who don't believe the same way that we do. When I say *"I honor all paths to God,"* I really mean it. Rather, this isn't an outer war at all; it's an inner war that requires surrender. You may have heard it said this way: to be in the world, but not of the world. This is a higher consciousness of transcending the human condition. You know, the human condition where we have bodies that get sick and they get injured; where we have feelings we have to deal with; where we're frail and sometimes fallible. That's the human condition!

But to be in this world and not of this world: it's a higher consciousness of transcending the human condition. Of surrendering and embodying our spiritual being-ness. When we go within and surrender to Spirit, then and only then do we conquer our bodies and our minds and our spirits. Only in surrender to the God of our being do we do this overcoming and conquering. What a paradox: only in surrender is victory! Usually we think when we surrender, we're the loser. But in surrender is victory: not in the outer surrender, but a true, profound and total surrender of letting go and letting God be God in us and through us.

That may sound like a tall order. Many of us think we know better than God. Yeah; sometimes I do. And then we act without praying and waiting for that answer from Spirit. And then we wonder why we flail around, making mistake after mistake, learning the hard way, and taking three times as long. If we'd only gone into the silence and asked for guidance first, and then waited until that guidance was so clear, we couldn't possibly misunderstand! If the answer's delayed, and you've done your inner work, you can be sure you're waiting in God's time.

I applied for a job several years ago I really wanted, and I didn't get it. The job came available again about three years later, and I applied again, and I didn't even get an interview. The job became available a few years later, and I got the job. And I love my job! Sometimes we have to wait in God's time.

The next part of the verse is: **"... will be given some of the hidden manna."** Manna is the bread of life: the word of God, metaphysically. Manna represents the realization that divine substance -- that "non-stuff" that everything is made of -- is everywhere present, and that we can access it. This is a promise that God will always supply us with whatever we need if we're willing to listen to that still, small voice within.

You may remember the story in Exodus of Moses and his band of Israelites. Metaphysically, Moses means "drawing out of the water": out of seemingly negative conditions comes new growth. When Moses was born, the Pharaoh had made a decree that all of the male Israelite children would be killed.

And so his mother put him in a basket and put him in the river. And Pharaoh's daughter found him and raised him as her own. God called Moses to speak to the Israelites, and Moses said, "*Who me? I don't speak well! Let someone else do it! Let my brother, Aaron, do it.*" We think that Moses may have had a speech impediment of some kind. So God agreed to let Aaron speak for Moses. And God directed Moses every step along the way, and Moses did exactly what God directed him to do. Moses listened!

Remember the movie, *Exodus*, with Charlton Heston and the parting of the seas? The Israelites left Egypt where they were enslaved. "Egypt" means mental bondage to sense thoughts, or material consciousness. To be enslaved means to not be free. The Israelites weren't free from the thoughts of the material world; they were mired in their own humanity, because they didn't have an active relationship with God.

Moses and his group of Israelites managed to leave Egypt, and they found themselves in the wilderness for 40 years! The number "40" means as long as it takes to get a new consciousness, and for all of the old ideas to die out, represented by the old people. You can't go forward with old ideas! You have to have a new consciousness.

Many of us have been taking what I call the "geographic cure." Say we lived in New York, and we got tired of the winters and the people, and we decide to move to California -- to L.A. -- where it's warmer. And so, we get on a plane and we travel to California. And the person who picks us up in California finishes the sentence of the person who dropped us off in New York. The common denominator is us: we take our problems with us wherever we go.

How many times have you been stuck in your own self-imposed wilderness? Too many to count for me! You can't move forward; you can't move backward. You're just living an [unintelligible] life, one day to the next. It's kind of like that movie, *Groundhog's Day*, where Bill Murray has to live the same day over and over again until he gets it right.

Well, every day in the wilderness, when the Israelites awoke, there was a substance on the ground called "manna." It was a fine, flake-like thing: fine as hoarfrost. And they didn't know what it was. And Moses told them what God told Moses: that it's the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. And so they tried it. And it tasted good! Moses said, "*The Lord has commanded that you gather it up and eat as much as you can.*" Some people gathered more; some people gathered less. But the amazing thing is: no matter how much they gathered, everyone had the same amount.

They were told not to save it for the next day. Of course, they didn't listen to Moses. There's a theme here: every time the Israelites didn't do what God wanted them to do, they got out of covenant. And then they had to go back into covenant again. This happens to me every time I think I know better than what God is directing me to do. So they tried to save the manna, because they didn't fully trust God to supply them with everything they needed to live there in the wilderness. And the manna that they saved spoiled by the next day.

But it didn't matter, because God sent new manna every single day to feed and nourish his chosen people! The Israelites only had to go out and collect it every day. They didn't have to plant seeds. They didn't have to grow it or water it or fertilize it or pull weeds or keep pests away. It was totally free for their taking, because God is a good and loving God. They didn't have to do anything! And God gave them everything they needed to live.

When we surrender fully to Spirit, the promise to be given "hidden manna" will be fulfilled. And we'll be given manna not visible to the world. We'll be given the peace that passes human understanding. We'll be given every opportunity that we need to create lives filled with peace and joy and love and health and wholeness and prosperity. When we listen to that still, small voice within, we'll be given an entirely new source of energy and nourishment ... because this hidden manna is derived from the higher level of Being within us. It nourishes us: our soul, first, and then our body.

In Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 33, Jesus says: "*Strive first for the kingdom, and all these things will be given to you.*" Metaphysically, the kingdom is the realm in humanity's consciousness where we know and understand God completely. When we are totally at one with the Divine, then all we have to do is ask, and we will receive.

In John, Chapter 4, Verse 32, Jesus says: "*I have food to eat that you do not know about.*" This hidden manna is a vital life substance and energy of Spirit. And we access it through prayer and meditation. Through listening with our spiritual ears, we directly assimilate it into our whole being.

And the final part of this Bible verse is: "***I will give you a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.***" This is the second part of God's promise to humanity. In the Old Testament, there are numerous stories of people who go through trials and tribulations, and when they triumph, they get a new name that represents their new consciousness and nature. This name came directly from God; no one else intervened or was even aware of the presentation of the new name. It was a very personal thing. It represents a new nature and a new relationship with God. Because they surrendered and were released from their bondage: their bondage of old ways of thinking. Of doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. When humanity is overcome and transformed, we'll be free from the old shackles holding us back from having a pure, true, loving relationship with the Divine.

When Bible characters transformed, they were given a white stone with their new name written on the stone. And when a prisoner got out of jail, he was given a white stone to show that he was a free person.

Take the example of Saul, who metaphysically means "personal will." Saul was a Jew, and he was adamantly, actively, with gusto persecuting the followers of the Way. The followers of the Way were the early Christians, before they became Christians later. On the way to Damascus, Saul had a conversion of body and mind and spirit. There on the road, he met the risen Christ, and he was struck by a light so bright it blinded him for three days. During his physical blindness, Saul had to look into his own consciousness. He had to own his actions. And he experienced a great conversion.

When he recovered, he became a follower of the way, and started teaching and healing, just as Jesus had done. He went from persecuting the early followers of the Way to becoming one of them: helping spread the good news of Jesus' teaching. At the time of his awakening, he was given a new name, and he became Paul. Remember that, metaphysically, Saul means personal will? Paul means "enlightened will." His personal will began to follow God's will. And Paul traveled all around the ancient Near East, and he was instrumental in spreading the teachings that later became the Christianity that we know today.

In Biblical times, a name was a very meaningful and sacred thing. And a change in name represents a change in consciousness. Abrahm became Abraham as God blesses him with a covenant to multiply and prosper him, making him the father of multitudes. And his wife, Sarai, became Sarah, as God blessed her and promised to give her a son.

Every name represents a quality that was in that character: the essence of who they were. As each of us surrenders and listens to that inner voice, we're promised a new name and a new nature. This is a new and higher realization of the "I AM" - that's a capital "I" and a capital "A" "M."

Before we understood Truth, when we would say, "I am," we usually think about our current situation or maybe what we do. I might say, "I'm a mother." "I'm a minister." "I'm a wife." "I'm a friend." That's the small-letter "I am."

But when we study, and we have a greater realization of the "I AM," we come to understand that it's not just an opinion of who we are and our state in life. But, rather, the "I AM" -- capital "I", capital "A" "M" -- is our awareness of our God-self. Our higher self. Our true self. This state of consciousness is a higher

and finer state of being than the humble opinion that we have of our human self. And it requires us to reach a higher level of consciousness within our own being: to face the realization of Truth of our real self. Our God-self. When we consciously surrender our human will, we receive hidden manna. When we surrender -- letting go of all our unnecessary baggage -- we become free from everything that's holding us back.

In a few minutes, we'll begin our White Stone Ceremony. In this White Stone consciousness, we allow our full potential to come forth. The color white represents joy and victory and purification. And as we surrender, we create a space for Spirit to open up the space for unlimited possibilities within us for this new year of 2021.

I encourage you to consciously invite the activity of God -- the Holy Spirit -- into your heart and mind for the next few minutes. Allow the impressions -- the intuitions of Spirit -- to bubble up in your heart and mind and consciousness, as it reveals a word for you that represents your new nature. Allow this new quality that Spirit is pressing out through you to come forth! Move from your head to your heart, putting your ego on hold just for a few minutes. And open your heart to the activity of Spirit, and let the Divine Holy Self come through. Give yourself permission to recognize and understand that new quality or name Spirit has waiting for you to incorporate into yourself in 2021. That word coming forth could be something like "love" or "peace" or "compassion." And you actually become that quality!

In a few moments, I will invite you to enter a time of prayer and meditation. During this time, listen to that still, small voice of Spirit as we quiet our minds and hearts. You may get a picture, an idea or a thought. And that's great! Or you may not get anything; don't worry! Time in silence is always rewarded, because you're doing the right thing. You're creating a way to quiet the mind and practice listening regularly that will allow things to flow.

If this is your first time, don't worry about pressuring yourself about what is "supposed" to happen. Just open up and be available for Spirit to work in you. By doing this, maybe later in the week -- when you're standing in line somewhere or driving on the 101 -- something will come to you. I recommend doing prayer and meditation consistently and frequently: daily is ideal. Doing it will make your life better. Things always flow more easily and more gracefully when we take time to open our minds and listen.

So I invite everyone to close your outer eyes, and take in a deep breath and release it slowly. To take in another deep breath, and begin to move your awareness within. Begin to shift your awareness from your head to your heart. Our intention is just to simply relax. Relax, knowing that God is love, and that you participate in that love. Relax, knowing that God created each of us with sacred worth. That, together with God, there is a plan and an amazing purpose for our lives. With God, there is more love available for each and every one of us. More good available for each of us. More peace to enjoy in this moment and always. More fulfillment to live out our dreams and visions for a fuller life.

Take in a deep breath as you expand your heart and mind into the fullness that is God. Relax and let go of any thoughts that may be passing through your minds. Gently quiet your mind and relax your body. Open yourself up to feel God's peace within. In this quiet, still space, gently ask: *"God, what is my next spiritual step? What do you want me to embody and express more of in this New Year? What direction -- what purpose -- do you want me to pursue at this time?"*

Something is calling you to greater levels of experiencing your best self in this new year. Calling you to live your most authentic life. To begin living in the most pure and joyous way possible. God's desire is for you to show up fully, authentically: as the enlightened spiritual being you were created to be. Simply by quieting your mind and having an intention to listen to God opens a space for Spirit to work in your consciousness. And your good will come to you in the right and perfect time, and in the perfect way. It may be now; it may be later. But it will come.

And so now I invite you to take a deep breath as we move into the silence with hearts open. And we listen for that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, guiding us to our new name.

SILENCE

If something comes to you, I invite you to write it on your stone. If nothing comes, continue to enjoy the silence and quiet your mind. Good things are coming soon.

SILENCE

And now we give thanks for this brief time together as we continue to commune and connect with the activity of Spirit: connecting to that infinite field of possibilities. If your word or name came to you, give thanks for it now. If it didn't, we give thanks in advance, knowing that it will be revealed in the right and perfect time.

Spirit, we give thanks for all the blessings in our lives. We give thanks for all the good that is still to come from you, oh God, for you are generous beyond measure. We give thanks for this bright and shining new year; may it bring each of us peace, love, hope, faith, health and prosperity. We pray and affirm this through the nature of the Living Spirit of God.

And so, my friends, something is calling us higher in this brand new year. Something is raising our consciousness to a brand new way. As we listen to that still, small voice within, we're given divine guidance that will guide us to our greater good. It's been written: *"Behold, I make all things new. For you are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased."* In this brand new year of 2021, something is calling you. Are you willing to quiet your heart and your mind, and listen?

Many blessings!

OFFERING

It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offering. Thank you for sending in your checks and contributions online; you've been keeping this ministry going throughout this last crazy year. We're so grateful for that!

Our offering blessing is: *"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 and 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

So thank you for being with us online; we hope that you have been blessed by our service and our meditation. Go online and check out all of our classes that are coming up in January; there are some really good ones. We hope you have a fabulous week!

Will you affirm our 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 fabulous week! Blessings!

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