

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE!

May 23, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

OPENING/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center! I'm Rev. Richard Maraj, senior minister, and we are so glad you're joining us today! And we're even more thrilled that we will be beginning LIVE services again in our Sanctuary on June the 6th at 9 and 11 a.m. Also at 11 a.m., our full Youth & Family Ministry classes will be on, as well.

Our mask policy will be as follows: if you have not had the vaccine, we are asking you to wear a mask. But if you have received it, that you don't need to wear a mask. Everyone will be doing social distancing as is comfortable for them. And we just want this to be as fun and as close to a regular Sunday service as possible!

One of the things in kicking back our services is that we find we need some extra volunteers to help us with ushering at the services. If you are interested, there's some information coming up that you can get in touch with Sue Thompson, who is our worship coordinator. And she will give you the information that you need. In addition to ushers that we need on Sundays – and even if you haven't done it before, we will give you training, and it will be a fun and enjoyable experience – we could also use a hand in our sound booth, as well. So if you're interested in that, contact Sue, as well. And, again, we will get you training, and it'll be a wonderful way to just be a part of the flow of Sunday service, and support it with your effort and your service, as well.

Finally, I'm in Week #3 of "Discover the Power Within You." It's a four-week class. Even if you missed the first two, each class stands on its own, and I know you'll get out of it how to truly discover the power within you!

Right now, we are going to take a time for some quiet and meditation. And Rev. Lori will lead us in that prayer. And before we do, we will now listen to the choir as they sing "Surely the Presence."

Unity of Phoenix Choir sings "Surely the Presence"

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place
I can see God's mighty power and God's grace
I can feel the brush of angels' 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 take just a little bit of time from this busy world we live in. I invite you to close your outer eyes, take in a deep, mindful breath, and release it slowly and gently. And take in another breath. And, as you let it go, let go of all the cares you have. Just release them. And take in another deep breath, and begin to move your awareness within: to that quiet, still place, where we are connected with the Divine. That place of spiritual communion. That place of recognizing that we are part of the greater whole.

And in this quiet, still place, we feel the presence of God within, knowing that we are the strength of the Living God. And, no matter what happens in life, we can go within and access that strength in every moment. That we are the peace of God: that stillness. That calmness that allows us to move through our day with poise.

Take in another deep breath and move more fully into the silence. As we listen for that still, small voice within: guiding us, giving us that next perfect step, leading us into our greater good. Knowing that we came here to be the magnificent spiritual beings that we were created to be in the very beginning. Our

oneness with God is our birthright; it's there in the very depths of our souls, calling us higher. Bringing us to new awareness of ways to love ourselves and love each other more fully. Because love is all there is.

We feel God's unconditional love within us. It lifts us up. God's love is the healing power that brings illumination to every cell, lighting our way to wholeness in body, in mind, and in spirit. And from this high and holy, exalted state of consciousness, we know that we are the love of God personified. That each and every one of us is here to spread God's love. To be kind when others are not. To share what we have when others have not. And to be the presence of the Living God in every moment.

And so we take just a few moments to move more deeply into the silence, as we feel the presence of God in us, and as us, and through us.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time away from our busy lives. We know that time spent in the silence moves us forward in beautiful ways to greater joy, to greater peace, to greater love, to greater prosperity, for that is our birthright. And so, God, for this and all our blessings, we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: Thank you, Rev. Lori! Really appreciate that; that was a wonderful meditation!

So why aren't windows good liars? Because you can see right through them!

Where does 007 keep his extra money? Bonds. Stocks and bonds.

And how do you get in touch with an amoeba? By "cell" phone! *[Laughs]*

I love these jokes! The reason I tell them is just to make you feel good! Hopefully to smile and – who knows? One day you might even laugh at one of them!

Today's topic I think is a feel-good topic, and it is called – today's message is – "Let Your Light Shine." First I want to ask you a couple of questions. So have you an area in your life where you know that you're dragging your feet and not giving it your all? Like, maybe your exercise program, or maybe a few items on your goals list. Or have you in a relationship with you kind of withheld, and you weren't as honest or as loving or as considerate as you know you could have been? Or have you ever had a hard time fully committing to giving something your all, like maybe your job or a relationship or even your spiritual practices? And, finally, is there an area in your life right now that – if you're really honest – you know that you are not shining your brightest?

You know, for the last few weeks I've been doing a class on one of my absolute favorite books of all time: *Discover the Power Within You*. It was probably the first Unity book I've ever read; it's by Rev. Eric Butterworth. And it had a really powerful impact on my life, because it really awakened and inspired me to a greater awareness of God's Spirit within me.

And Eric Butterworth says that Jesus' real mission of his entire ministry was to teach people and to show them how to discover that light of God in them. That Christ light; that Divine light. That eternal light that shines in us that no darkness can ever overcome. He said it is the light of the world that dwells in each of us, and he wanted us to – not just discover it – but to bring it forth, and to let it shine.

Jesus' famous words on this are in the Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 14-16. And here's what it says: *"You are the light of the world! A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it under a bushel basket, but they put it on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

You are the light of the world! Isn't that wonderful news?!? I mean, isn't that powerful? Isn't that amazing? But I think sometimes, I don't think we really grasp how amazing and powerful that truth is: that you are the light of the world!

Eric Butterworth says that *"You are the light of the world"* means this: *"It means that you are the very activity of God in expression. So that there is no place where the light of God is anymore present than where you are. And that there is no one that is any more privileged to radiate that light than you. You are the light of the world! And you are here to let your light shine."*

And the thing is: Doesn't that sound wonderful? And doesn't it sound easy? But the truth is: Often, we don't let our light shine. In fact, often we sometimes dim our light or turn our light down. Sometimes going through our trials and tribulations can get us to the point where it feels like our light is just flickering, and being close to being extinguished. Sometimes we end up just living in the darkness, even though there's a light there in us that never ... that nothing can overcome! We still sometimes hold back and hide our lights.

Jesus warned us: *"Do not hide your light!"* Yet how often do we hide our light of love? Our light of joy? Our light of understanding? I mean, have you ever hidden your beauty? Or hidden your talent or your passion or your greatness? I mean, it is amazing how sometimes we hold back this magnificent light that is within us!

One of the things Eric Butterworth says is that the light is within us; we just make it really hard *[laughs]* for that light to actually come forth! And some of the things we do to make it hard for that light within us to come forth is that we judge ourselves. And we judge others. We judge the appearances, and let all the outer conditions in our lives draw us away and distract us from feeling that connection.

Another thing we do is: we tend to dwell in the past a lot. We have a difficult time letting go of the past. And we have a difficult time, sometimes, of forgiving and releasing our grudges and bitterness and resentment.

Another thing we do is: we tend to focus on lack and negativity. But the worst thing we do – that keeps us from experiencing the light – is that we're always looking outside of ourselves for the answers. For solutions. For peace. For joy. For fulfillment. We're always looking outside of ourselves, instead of exploring within.

The fact is: Butterworth says that the greatest breakthrough ever made was made by Jesus of doing his inner exploring ... Exploring his inner space, where he had a breakthrough in the spiritual realm. Where he really discovered his natural divinity ... but not just his own divinity, but the divinity of all human beings. That there really is and truly a light in us. And he discovered that connection of breaking through to that inner realm: happens in our mind. That, within ourselves, as we go deeper into Spirit, we will unify and align with that light of God that is within us. With the mind of God!

He discovered that prayer is not something to change God; that prayer is something to open and quiet and align and reset our minds to be fully connected and immersed in the mind of God. And he was inviting us to have that same breakthrough in that inner spiritual realm within ourselves! And to discover that connection. Discover that light. And to bring it forth and let it shine!

So today we're going to look at: How do we let our light shine? What do we need to do to allow it to come forth and radiate from us?

And the first thing we need to do is to OPEN AND DEEPEN OUR CONNECTION TO THAT LIGHT. Eric Butterworth says this. He says, *"There are reserves of light within you, but you must discover it and release it."* And what he's saying is that, the deeper we go, the more we open a space to allow more of the light within us to come forth. That the more time we spend in the light – immersing ourselves in the light of God – that the more light will actually come forth from us. Because this process is an ongoing

spiritual process of opening and deepening our connection and awareness of the light. Of our awareness of Spirit. And more will come forth.

It kind of reminds me of the Parable of the Talents. Remember that master gave one of his slaves five talents, and the other one three. And they both doubled it. And I love his words at the end. He said, *"Well done, my good and faithful servants. You have done well with what I have given you; now you can share more of your master's joy."* And what he is saying is: The more we use what we have, and the deeper we go, we will find that there is even more light and goodness and Spirit available to us. And so here are the ways that he says we can open and deepen our connection to the light within.

And the first one is, obviously, more time spent with Spirit: more time spent in the quietness and the stillness, and immersing ourselves in the light of God.

The second one he says is that, whenever you get excited about some spiritual principle or some spiritual teaching, he says just get quiet and take it in until something amazing happens in you. And if you get inspired by an idea of oneness or the abundance of God – or whatever it might be – that whenever something triggers you, and gets you excited, take it within and let it open you up to a greater awareness.

And then the third one is kind of connected to that. He says if you read something that really inspires you, recognize that you're stirring up the gift of God in you. And just let it do its work. Don't just move on to something else; just bask in it, and let it grow and expand and take you even deeper.

The more we spend time, the brighter that light is. The more we connect with Spirit, it deepens that experience and allows even more to come forth.

One of the other things he says is that, every single morning – if we want to open and deepen our connection to the light – we should say these words. You know the word "namaskara"? It actually means, *"I salute the divinity in you."* Well, here's what he says that we should affirm to ourselves every single morning: *"Namaskara. I salute the divinity in myself. I am strong and able. I can do all that I need to do this day. My mind is alert, and my body is vital and healthy. And my way will be strewn with golden opportunities. No matter what this day will bring to me, there is that in me that is enough to meet it, to overcome it, and to be blessed by it."*

Again, Butterworth says, *"You are the very activity of God in expression, and there is no place where the light is more present than where you are! And there is no one that is more privileged to radiate that light than you."* So the first step in shining the light is opening and deepening our connection to the light.

The second thing we need to do is to really EXPAND THE LIGHT: showing up as the living activity of God with a conscious intention to spread that light in areas where we're struggling. Areas where we're having conflict. Areas that really aren't clicking for us.

So the first way to expand our light is to bring light into areas where we really are having struggle and turmoil. Here's what Butterworth says. He says, *"Agree with thine adversary, remembering that an adversary is not the person or the situation that stands before you, but it is your reaction or your feeling about it."* Things may happen around you, and things may happen to you, but the things that are really most important is what happens in you! We can't control what happens to us, but we can control what we think about it, and what we think at that time is our life at that particular moment.

And what he's saying is that, when we have conflict, don't look without. The most important thing you can do is shine that light within to those areas of struggle: our anger or hurt or woundedness or upset. That shining the light on ourselves – the light of compassion ... you know, the light of love, the light of understanding and care – will begin to bring a sense of peace and a healing to ourselves. And it'll transform how we see and interact with other individuals and situations in our outer life.

If we really want to let our light shine, first we've got to shine it on ourselves. And any time you have a reaction, or you get upset, look within and let that light bathe you and soothe you and heal you from

within. It is the most powerful and the most important way we can use that light so that we can radiate it in greater ways.

The second way that we can expand the light is to use the light in the areas where we seem to be holding back. Like, can you think of three areas where you know you're not giving it your best and your all? Like, maybe in self-care? Maybe in your family relationships? Maybe in your finances? Maybe in how you're dealing with your past or an addiction? What area in your life do you know you're not giving it your all and your best? And then to ask yourself: How would the living activity and presence of God – if I were living it – show up in how I take care of myself? How would it show up in the work that I do? How would it show up in how I'm dealing with my past? How would it show up in how I'm handling this addiction?

Bringing the light to think: How would my highest God-centered self let my light shine in these areas of my life, where I seem to be holding back giving my very best? What would be different in how you would show up in your self-care – in the areas that you're struggling – if you lived and let your light shine fully?

And then the final one is that he says to make sure that we see life right. He said we're not here to "set" it right; we are here to see it right: to literally use the light of your imagination to see life how you would like it to be. To see greater possibilities. He writes, *"Decide the kind of world you want to experience: the kind of friends you want to have, the success you want to achieve, the kind of conditions you would like to manifest in your home, in your neighborhood, in your office ... and begin to think the kind of thoughts that will draw them to you by the irresistible force of consciousness."*

Expanding our light into the areas where we're struggling – particularly pointing at ourselves when we're having anger or resentful reactions. Point is to the areas where we know we're not living our best, and see what would the light come through as to take better care of ourselves and handle those areas. And, finally, use that light to expand the possibilities of how far you see, and the world and the life that you would like to create. Because it absolutely makes a difference!

And the final one is to SHARE THE LIGHT. You know when Jesus says, *"And it gives light to everyone in the house"*? Well, those houses back then were really huge, and they could fit, like, 40 or 50 people. So, in these big houses that they're talking about, when you put your light on your stand, it gives light to everyone in the house. There were three to seven families, and there was a light holder for each of the families. So let's say there were seven families; that would be seven candle holders. And so, when you put your light on the stand, it would naturally give you light ... but it would give other people in the house in the light, as well.

But what would happen sometimes is that someone didn't have enough fuel or butter to put their light. They would have to depend on other people's lights. And so they would sit in the darkness until someone lit their light, and then they would get some light. But sometimes, in some houses, people would withhold – they wouldn't ... They would just sit in the darkness and just wait for someone else's – even if they had fuel – to kind of suck off some of their light and use it. And then some other people would literally take their light and put a cover over it so it only shed in their area, and they didn't share it with other people.

And so, what this is saying is that, when we put our light on a lamp stand, it blesses us and it blesses others. And when you are living at your best – when you're expressing that Spirit within you – it blesses you and others. But when you hide your light, it actually makes your life more uncomfortable, restricts and limits the light you experience, and it withholds light from others.

I looked at some research about selflessness, and all the ways we define selflessness: giving, helping, generosity, having compassion, volunteering, doing good for others ... whether they're neighbors or friends or family or total strangers. It's about doing the right thing and doing the most caring thing. They have found that "selflessness" impacts our life in greater ways than we can imagine! It creates lasting

happiness, inner satisfaction. It reduces the impact of our ego and our level of pride. It makes us more considerate and thoughtful. But here's the one that surprised me: It actually expands our minds in terms of our creativity, spontaneity, intuition and inspiration. And here's how: If you do something for someone – and you're just thinking of what the payoff is to you – you actually block the ability to have spontaneous joy and spontaneous feelings from your heart! Because when you're preoccupied, thinking about what's going, you reduce the ability for spontaneity to happen. And you also reduce your ability for inspiration and intuition to come through. So the more you purely are selflessly acting to do good for another human being, you keep the channel open for that flow of good to come back to you in easier and greater ways.

Another thing is: People who are selfless are more likable! People want to be around them, and it's easier to make friends. And so you can see that, when you let your light shine by sharing your light, it actually blesses and fulfills you and blesses and fulfills the people around you, as well! Studies show that withholding love, and even being selfish, actually is harder on ourselves than we realize! And it does not help us; it doesn't help others. It doesn't help the world. And it doesn't help living from that place of letting our light shine. It doesn't help us live from that place of being our best spiritual self.

And the thing is: This being selfless and sharing our light is a lot easier than you think! It can be as simple as letting someone in in traffic. Or opening a door for someone. Or smiling. Or giving them a compliment. Or giving them the last piece of pizza. Or giving them your chair in a waiting room. Or giving them a helping hand with the groceries. Or telling them a silly, little joke ... like: What do fish wear in aquariums? "Tank" tops! [*Simulates "rim shot" drum roll*] And sometimes being kind is maybe not telling jokes, too! I don't really know!

You know, maybe it's reaching out to a friend that isn't feeling well, and just sending a little note: "*I hope you're feeling a better today.*" I mean, there are all kinds of ways to just be kind. To just share your light. To just be selfless and think about someone else. Maybe it's to ask them: "*So how are you doing? Everything going okay? Is your family okay?*" All these are simple ways of shining our light, and let it get brighter and brighter. To bless you. To bless others. And to bless our world.

Do you know there's a light in you that no darkness can ever overcome? There's a light in you just waiting to allow yourself to open up and to let it come forth, and let it radiate through your smile, through your words, through your thoughts! Through all the ways that you are in every moment of your day.

So three things I just want you to remember is to open and deepen your connection to that light. And then I want you to expand that light in all the different areas. And then, finally, share the light. Because when you do, it will bless you. It will bless everyone in your house. It will lift up our world. The question is: Are you willing to let your line shine?

God bless you all!

SOLO

Guest artist Todd Herzog sings "Hero"

There's a hero
If you look inside your heart
You don't have to be afraid
Of what you are

There's an answer
If you reach inside your soul
And the sorrow that you know
Will melt away, yeah

And then a hero comes along
With the strength to carry on
And you cast your fears aside
And you know you can survive

When you feel like hope is gone
Look inside you and be strong
And you'll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you

It's a long road
When you face the world alone
No one reaches out a hand
For you to hold

You can find love
If you search within your soul
And the emptiness you felt
Will disappear, yeah

And then a hero comes along
With the strength to carry on
And you cast your fears aside
And you know you can survive

When you feel like hope is gone
Look inside you and be strong
And you'll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you

Lord knows
Dreams are hard to follow
But don't let anyone
Tear them away

Hold on
'Cause there will be tomorrow
In time
You'll find the way

Oh, then a hero comes along
With the strength to carry on
And you cast your fears aside
And you know you will survive

When you feel like hope is gone
Look inside you and be strong
And you'll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you
That a hero lies in you
That a hero lies in you

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. 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, for these tithes, and for 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 join us at our online service! Now it's time to say our Prayer for Protection. Will you affirm it 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!

And now we'll hear the choir sing the Peace Song. Have a blessed week!

Choir sings Peace Song:

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
Family all are we!
Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony!

Let peace begin with me;
Let this be the moment now!
With every breath 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!

Copyright 2021 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Maraj