

WHITE STONE CEREMONY

Sunday, Jan. 7, 2024

Rev. Richard Maraj

So there was this new pastor just going to the homes of the different parishioners to say, "Hi," and at one house, it seemed like someone was there, but nobody was answering. And he was knocking and saying, "Hello!" Knocking and knocking, and no one came. And then he took his business card and he wrote on it, Revelation 3, Verse 20.

And then the following Sunday, that same card reappeared in the offering plate, except next to Revelation 3:20 was written Genesis 3:10. The pastor got his Bible and looked it up and started laughing. Revelation 3:20 says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Genesis 3:10 reads, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, for I was naked." [Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh]

And so um... Okay.

So how many people have ever had the feeling that you were meant for more? Meant to do more, be more, experience more? How many people have ever had that? And how many people -- even though you've been really successful -- feel that there's something in you that hasn't fully been expressed or shared? Has been untapped? And finally, even though you know you've got a good life, that sometimes you feel like something is missing ...? That there is something deeper, that there is more that you haven't been able to connect with? Anybody?

You know, as we start the year 2024, I want you to think of what your goals and your intentions -- what your desires -- are for this year.

You know, at the beginning of the year, it's our tradition that we will set resolutions. And here are the most common kind of resolutions: to get fit; get in shape; eat healthier; improve your finances or get out of debt; lose weight; spend more time with the family; have more work-life balance; quit smoking, plan your dream vacation; and meditate more regularly. And this is how we start our year.

And if you look at resolutions, they're all with the intention and desire to improve our lives: to be happier, to be more fulfilled in some way. And I was thinking the other day. I wonder what mystics and spiritual teachers do. Do they set intentions? Do you think Jesus set an intention at the New Year? Or do you think Buddha, or Yogananda, or Krishna, or Meister Eckhart, or Thich Nhat Hanh ... Do you think these guys are thinking, *"Let me eat more salads. And let me go to the gym three times and lose 10 pounds."* [Congregation laughs]

I have a feeling that maybe that's not the intentions they set ... that maybe they're a little bit more spiritually focused. Maybe it is to fulfill their divine purpose. Or maybe it is to be an instrument and a vehicle through which people are healed and comforted and uplifted. And maybe it's to fully express the individual that they came here to be. Maybe it is to make a difference for the well-being and the welfare of all humanity.

In the Gospel of Thomas, it says, *"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. And if you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."*

And I really believe that there is a yearning in all of us that no success or money or status could ever fill. That resolutions do some good -- and there's nothing wrong with any of them -- but I believe that we really need to go deeper. If we want to experience that more and that meaning and that fulfillment, we need to bring forth what is within us. We need to find our purpose and express it and embody it fully.

You know, the White Stone Ceremony is a process to help us find and embody and express our divine potential of our soul's calling. And I think it is something that is based on the idea and the awareness

that God has a plan and purpose for all of our lives; that we are here for a reason. We are here to make a difference. And it is for us to listen and tune into it, you know, so we can discover and hear. and express that calling.

This ceremony was created by a unity minister named Rev. David Williamson. And I was in our school trip about 25, 26 years ago at his church in Hollywood, Florida, and did it. And it was an incredible experience. And every year I enjoy doing it because I think it's powerful.

And it is based on the book of Revelation, Chapter 2, Verse 17. And here's what it is says:

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give 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.”

Let me do it again. In fact, you can join me. Let's read it together! [With congregation]

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give 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.”

Now let's look at that a little closer. Notice the first two lines begin “to anyone” and “to everyone.” And it means that Spirit is available and accessible to all of us, to everyone. There's no exclusions. That every one of us has a plan and a purpose for our lives.

But the thing is: we need to work for it. And you know that famous line, that “*Many are called but few are chosen?*” There is a minister named Tom Costa and he said the real way to read that is that, “*Everyone is called but few choose to live a dedicated spiritual life, to take the spiritual path as their number one priority.*”

And so what it says is: to anyone who listens; to anyone who is willing to stop and pause to be still and to connect; to listen to the still, small voice; to listen to the intelligence and the wisdom and guidance that created us and the stars in the sky; to listen to that intelligence for its guidance ... If you are willing to listen!

And then the second one is to everyone who conquers. And it means: to everyone who overcomes the challenges of life and still wants to move ahead. To someone who is willing to overcome; who's willing to learn and grow and discover and expand who they are; or someone who really wants to take their life to the next spiritual level ...

And so to anyone who's willing to listen and to anyone who wants to overcome and move forward to go to a higher level, they will receive three things.

And the first one is the **hidden manna**. Everyone knows that the manna is the bread that God provided for the children of Israel in the desert when they were brought out of slavery in Egypt. And this manna was, you know, it was bread, but it really represents spiritual nourishment. It represents our daily bread, our daily provision and guidance and sustenance.

And you know why it was daily bread? So it was daily; it got damaged and destroyed every single day. And the reason it was daily is so that we could put trust that it would always be there every day. That it lasted the day long and to know that it would be there day after day after day.

You ever want to start something, have a project or a goal and you want to know every single step along the way before you start? We are sometimes like that. And this is trying to say: you just need your daily bread. You just need to know what you need to do today. All you need to do is do the next step and I'll reveal more day after day. Daily you will be guided. Stop worrying about the future and projecting and

thinking you've got to know all those things. Just trust God that there's a plan for you, and listen for and trust your daily spiritual nourishment, your daily guidance, your daily bread.

And then the second one, it says that you'll receive a **white stone**. Back then, then, when people were released from prison, they got a white stone to prove that they were free; to show that they were no longer in prison, that they were absolutely free.

How many people have ever felt trapped or stuck in some situation in your life feel like you couldn't get out? Anybody? Okay, about five of us; okay, that's perfect. [Congregation laughs] And the thing is, sometimes we start to believe that we're trapped, we're stuck, that we're powerless. That we can't get out of this; we can't break that pattern. That circumstance is controlling me or limiting me. And what this is saying: that white stone represents that you're free! There is nothing holding you back! You have incredible spiritual power! That you are free to change; you're free to choose; you're free to create a new life; you're free to change your direction ... to change your mindset and your attitude and your outlook.

I mean, hold on to that white stone and look at it for a second. It's a symbol of how free you are! And you have incredible power for you to choose how you use it.

"I am free."

Let's say that together: [with congregation] *"I am free."*

Take a deep breath and feel how free you are.

Again: [with congregation] *"I am free!"*

Again: [with congregation] *"I am free!"*

"I am free to choose."

Together: [with congregation] *"I am free to choose."*

"I am free to change."

Together: [with congregation] *"I am free to change."*

"I am free to create a new life."

[Congregation]: *"I am free to create a new life."*

"I am free!" [With congregation]: *"I am free."*

So the daily guidance of manna you will get. And then the awareness that you are free. You are powerful and you are free to create a new life.

And then the last one is you'll get a **new name**. So in the Bible, a name really represented your purpose and your direction. Moses' name means to be drawn out. Coincidentally Moses was drawn out of the Nile by Pharaoh's sister and raised. And his purpose was to draw out the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. The name is symbolic of our direction and our purpose.

And when there's a change of name in the Bible, it means there's a higher calling. You're being called to something higher and greater. Like you remember Abram became Abraham. At the age of 100, he became Abraham and had Isaac. And his name used to be "Exalted Father" as Abram. And as Abraham, it was "Father of Many Nations." And so the shift shows that he was called to something greater. He was meant to embody and express a higher aversion and calling.

Another one was Jacob. His name got changed to Israel. And Jacob means supplanter. He stole Esau's birthright and then he wrestled with the angel. And Israel, his new name, was called "to strive with God." And another one Peter -- Simon Peter -- was changed because Jesus wanted him to be the rock upon which he would build his church.

So any time there was a change in name, it was a change of our calling and our purpose. and our direction and the difference that we are here to make. It's not just a name; it is a spiritual attribute. It is a spiritual quality that we are here to embody.

And I don't know what yours is. It could maybe be love. Maybe you are to embody more love in all of your relationships and at work and everywhere you go. Maybe it's to embody kindness. Maybe it's peace. Maybe your word might be healing. You know, maybe it's to let go; maybe it's balance. I don't know what it is for you, but I know there is something calling you for you for you embody and make a stand for and be an instrument and example of that thing.

And the thing is, you don't have to be it now. Peter was not exactly the rock of faith all the time. And Moses wasn't exactly the great leader. But once you get that calling, you begin to consciously embody and develop the consciousness of someone who is meant to fulfill that particular thing.

And so what is that thing for you? What is your new name? What is your new purpose? What is your new direction? What is that spiritual attribute that you are being called to embody and express this year?

And the last line says, "And no one knows it except the one who receives it." And what that is saying: it can only be revealed to you. You know, nobody can go to that secret place and listen to the still, small voice for us. Nobody can have a spiritual awakening for us. A part of our path is to discover what it is we came here to do -- discover what that is. That is a part of the path.

I bet most of us would like to say, "Hey, could you just tell me what my purpose is?" [Congregation laughs] But a part of the process is for us to seek it and find it and discover it. That's a part of the journey. That's a part of that process.

So overall, Revelation 2:17 says this: To any and everyone who will listen and is willing to overcome and move forward and wants to move to another level, you will receive the spiritual nourishment; you will know that you are powerful and free; and you'll receive that guidance -- that new name and direction for your life, the name that only you can receive and find out for yourself.

Life is calling you. God is calling you to embody and express some spiritual attribute that only you can express and make a difference in the people in your life. The question is: Are you willing to listen?

So I invite you to pick up your white stone and let's do a little exercise to help us listen to Spirit; listen to what that calling is for us this year. So I invite you to close your eyes as we open ourselves to God's Spirit. And let's listen to the words of this song to help open our hearts to Him. hear our new name, our new purpose for this year.

[Soloist Jamie Parnell sings: "Something's calling me. Something's calling me. Something's calling me a little bit deeper than I've ever been before. Something's calling me a little bit deeper than I've ever been before."]

And so I invite you to take a deep breath. And with a clear and sincere intention to listen to what Spirit is calling for us to do in this new year. Take another deep breath as you just fully open your heart to God, asking God, "What is my calling? What is my new name? What is that spiritual attribute you want me to embody this year? What is the purpose for which you've called me? What is the difference you want me

to make? Show me and reveal that to me in the quietness of my heart so that I can be the greatest channel of light and love and good for myself, for my family, my community, and our world."

In Scripture, it says, *"If you seek me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart."* And what that's saying is: the more sincere we are, that we will definitely receive what it is that we are seeking.

So listen for this like if a friend was going to tell you a secret. Just be alert and excited and aware. This attribute and spiritual quality, this new name for you, may come as an idea or a picture or a feeling. And just trust that God will give it to you in exactly the way that you need so that you will understand. Know you don't need to force; just let it come to you. Just allow it; open yourself to it. It might come in this moment, but it will definitely come as a result of this moment. Just listen for your purpose and calling for this year.

If it comes now I invite you to just write your word on your stone and give thanks to God. And if it doesn't come in this moment, to give thanks that it will come soon and you can write it on your stone later.

Something is calling you. God has brought you here for an amazing purpose, and that is to be a blessing. To uplift and to bless and nurture and comfort others. And whatever form it is, open your heart to receive it. And so for all the good that God has given us in our lives, and for all the good that is still to come, we say, *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."* Amen.

You are meant for more: to do more, to be more, to express more. It's cool to have some resolutions, but let's have the resolution that Jesus spoke when he said, *"Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."* Let's make a priority for our lives this year to listen to what Spirit is saying to us; to listen to our guidance; to listen to our calling, and to embody it and fully express it.

Because God is calling us deeper than we've ever been before. And let's all take time to listen. God bless you all!

[Congregation applauds]

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