

God's Gushing Gift
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Exodus 17:1-7; John 4:5-42
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Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

John 4: 5-42:

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our

ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'

I don't know if it was a fluke, or luck, or divine providence, but I went to see *Hamilton* this week—it opened in San Francisco for previews. *Hamilton* is the hyped-up musical about America's founding fathers that was first staged in 2015 at The Public Theatre in New York. NY Times reporter Ben Brantley wrote upon its Broadway debut later that year, "The press *Hamilton* has received is usually reserved for once-in-a-lifetime comets or the births of little royal celebrities."

Wall Street Journal reporter Terry Teachout says, "Do whatever you have to do short of grand larceny to score a ticket to *Hamilton*. It'll make you want to stand on your seat and yell with delight—and no matter which side of the political fence you may favor, it will also remind you of what a unique privilege it is to live in a flawed

but free country that was forged on the anvil of revolution by giants like Alexander Hamilton.”

Musical theatre legend Steven Sondheim says about *Hamilton*, “Rhyme does something to the listener’s perception that is very important, and the writer of *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda recognizes that.” The play begins with these lines about Alexander Hamilton, sung by the character of Aaron Burr, the 3rd vice president of the United States, who ends up killing Hamilton. I warn it’s PG-13:

*How does a bastard
Orphan
Son of a whore and
A Scotsman
Dropped in
The middle of a forgotten
Spot in
The Caribbean by Providence
Impoverished
In squalor
Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?*

When Hamilton then soon enters the stage, he raps, “My name is Alexander Hamilton, and there’s a million things I haven’t done.”

Yes, not just the dancing, movement and music are exceptional – but the lyrics are gripping, captivating and exciting, fresh and literally the entire show is written in rhyme. Ron Chernow, the author of the book that inspired Lin-Manuel Miranda to create the play, remarks, “He had accurately condensed the first 40 pages of my book into a four-minute song. And he had forged a unique idiom that blended formal 18th-century speech with 21st-century slang.

Filtered through Lin-Manuel’s extraordinary mind, the lyrics sounded natural and spontaneous. Next thing I knew, he sent me an email and said to go on YouTube, that he had performed that first song at the White House and gotten a standing ovation from the Obamas. I thought to myself, “Wow, I am strapped to a real rocket with this young guy.”

In fact, the success of *Hamilton* is given as perhaps one of the reasons U.S. Treasury decided to put the face of Harriet Tubman not on the front of the \$10 bill, as previously intended, replacing Alexander Hamilton, but the \$20 bill instead, replacing Andrew Jackson. This change is set to happen in 2020, to exemplify “more of the American story, to reflect the contributions of women and speak to the diversity of the U.S.”

For me, the most impressive and mind-blowing feature of the show, *Hamilton*, was the casting. Along with Aaron Burr, George Washington also enters the stage, a

black man, and it is fully believable and embracable. The three Schuyler sisters are of different ethnic backgrounds and this, too, is fully believable. The understudy playing Alexander Hamilton in the show I saw is Latino, and he understudies for the 2 main roles – also Aaron Burr, Hamilton’s nemesis, played in the show I saw by a black actor.

This, to me, is the genius of Hamilton: the ability of its creator to unleash cultural confines that celebrate humanity, to blast the racial and ethnic barriers that separate us from one another and let us just enjoy and revel in the pure excitement of our common identities as human beings with a common history.

The author of the book was invited to one of the first rehearsals and recalls poking his head into the room and seeing eight actors standing in front of eight music stands, thinking, “Oh my goodness, they’re all black and Latino! What on earth is Lin-Manuel thinking? When this is over, I need to sit down and talk to him alone. We’re talking about the founding fathers of the United States.” But after a minute or two, he said he started to listen and he forgot the color and ethnicity of these astonishingly talented young performers. Within five minutes, he says he became a militant on the subject of color-blind casting.

And this is the exact context of our gospel passage today. Color-blind casting.

The line before our passage begins states that Jesus left Judea and started back to Galilee, but he had to go through Samaria. Jesus doesn’t have to, but he HAD to go through Samaria. Have you ever felt like you HAD to do something? Jesus HAD to go through Samaria not because it was the shortest route but because it was God’s will and plan for his life.

Similarly, Miranda doesn’t have to, but he HAD to have black and Hispanic actors to play the lead roles Hamilton; because this is what the situation calls for to be most -- most radical, but perhaps even most authentic. Most revolutionary. What makes Hamilton so extraordinary is that it is a story about the American revolution and it is currently revolutionary – the hip-hop style of musical theatre, the multi-racial casting incorporates revolutionary elements which themselves depict the essence of the revolutionary times. It makes history current in a way that is actually futuristic. It points to the way things are and of things to come.

You know Jesus is a radical revolutionary, right? He travels from Jerusalem to Galilee and HAD to go through Samaria because it was the way most Jews would avoid. Don’t go through Samaria. Don’t cast a black man as George Washington. It won’t work. Jesus doesn’t focus on status quo or cultural “norms.” Jesus goes through Samaria and stops at the well to take a well-deserved break, resting in the heat of the day in the place Jews don’t frequent let alone stop and rest. Like it’s a perfectly normal thing to do. An African-American George Washington. A Jew in Samaria.

And there he is, alone, thirsty and vulnerable, and meets a woman who is also alone, thirsty and vulnerable. The woman is at first skeptical of Jesus, of his audacity to speak with her and ask her for a drink -- her, a woman; her, a Samaritan; her, a woman of ill repute. And he tells her he has living water to offer, if she knew the gift of God.

She takes him literally at first, like Nicodemus last week, recognizing that he has no bucket. "Those who drink of the water I will give them will never be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life," Jesus says. She gets it. She doesn't keep contemplating or racking her brain around it -- "Sir, give me this water," she says. He tells her to go get her husband and she replies she doesn't have a husband. True, he says, you've had 5, and the one you're living with now is not your husband.

She has been married five times. This may sound like an exaggeration, but my beloved grandmother, may she rest in peace, was married five times, all ending in divorce, none in death. My dad remembers being at the grocery store checkout counter with his dad, the first of my grandmother's husbands, in their small town of Vinita, Oklahoma, and looking down the line at the other checkout counters and there one after the other were my grandmother's subsequent husbands, each checking out. He waved somewhat surprisingly, somewhat awkwardly and said hello to each one.

Jesus doesn't judge or condemn or make it awkward for the woman. They engage in a bit of theological discourse, the woman questioning where is the proper place to worship and Jesus points to a day when controversial things and divisions no longer have power; true worshipers will have sincerity of heart -- spirit and truth. Jesus reveals that just as who God loves has no boundaries, because God loves all, God also is revealed beyond restrictions and confines of any mountain or temple. The temple and the sacred mountain are no longer religious barriers. There are no barriers to receiving the love of God.

The woman runs to the city proclaiming, "Come and see a man! Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" and for once, she is seen. She is heard. The man who saw everything she ever did and still loves her is what saves her. She knows who Jesus is because he truly sees her and loves her, she experiences the love of God through him. She runs into town like a black George Washington and she is believable.

She is so believable that the disciples, witnessing her interaction with their Lord, do not interrupt to remark or question that Jesus is speaking with a woman, speaking with a Samaritan, speaking with a person of ill-repute; they are perhaps tongue tied. "But -- you're not... Uh! Whaaaat's....?" They simply stand in astonishment that the boundaries have been crossed and the sky hasn't yet fallen in.

The disciples, who had gone to find food, realize Jesus hasn't yet eaten. "I have food that you don't know about," Jesus tells them. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."

His work was in Samaria, for he stayed there two more days, with the people who believed him – first because of the woman of ill-repute-turned-evangelist, then because they experienced it for themselves. Truly, this is a barrier breaker. Truly, this man breaks the barrier between not just woman and man and Samaritan and Jew but between God and humankind. This man integrates the two. And what does that look like? It looks like truly, the Savior of the world. Soon, he will break the barrier between life and death.

The brilliance and hype of *Hamilton* is that it expands our perceptions of what's possible. Forget George Washington having to be a white male in a wig; forget hip-hop music being for disenfranchised youth in baggy jeans. Put it on Broadway and somehow it works splendidly. We've now crossed over.

It is quite simply the same genius and brilliance and hype of Jesus. I'm not saying they'll be talking about *Hamilton* in 2,000 years, and that it's some sort of new gospel, but the genius of Jesus is that he expands our perception of what's possible – where to travel, who to talk to, where to worship, how to worship, who is our neighbor, who we are to love.

Jesus erases the boundaries and categories of who is acceptable. Jesus changes the cast of characters from what we expected to what we perhaps least expect, and everyone -- the characters and the audience are transformed. All who witness. This is the hype of *Hamilton* – Broadway has gone where it hasn't gone before. Those who are thirsty are given something new to drink that breaks boundaries and is life-giving.

The Hebrew Bible reading speaks of Moses being tormented by the thirsty exiles in the desert craving a drink. "They're abouta stone me!" He cries out to God, "Help me, please!" "Take a couple trustworthy people, go to a rock, strike your staff upon it, and see what happens. I'll be with you," God says. Presto. The people can all drink. Apparently, the water from that rock is still gushing to this day.

The good news today is that the living water is not a trickle; we are not ever in a drought of the living water. The living water gushes. When we tap into the living water, the source of the continual spring of life gushes up, and becomes a source of life for ourselves and a source of life for others. When we realize how thirsty we have become, we need only accept the offer of this gift of God, the gushing water, which knows no limits or boundaries to our receiving it. Let us drink this living water, that we may never again be thirsty.