



# God on Broadway

Week 1: *Hamilton*

Lori Lampert - 01/11/2025

When Brian decided to begin a series of sermons called *God on Broadway* after the first of the year, I did not suppress my excitement. It may have been a bit over the top. I kind of jumped up and down waving my hand and shouting "ooooo, pick me!" If you know me well enough you would know I am absolutely a broadway musical geek. Truly and completely.

There are few joys greater to me than sitting in a theater and listening to a musical. Live is the first choice, but having a musical on my TV at the touch of a remote is wonderful. I cannot even begin to count how many times I've seen *Camelot*, *Mary Poppins*, *Les Miserables*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and now I even own *Wicked*.

Music touches me somewhere deep in my soul. Telling a story with music is the best. It's the words of a song that will stay with me. I am never accurate singing out loud, but in my head you should hear how great I can sound.

And of all the musicals the past several years that spoke to me, my favorite is *Hamilton*. Music, lyrics, and book written by Lin-Manuel Miranda. It came to the Broadway stage in 2015.

I have heard Miranda talk about how he was inspired to write the musical after reading Ron Chernow's biography of Hamilton. Miranda said there was so much he learned from the book. How Hamilton was orphaned at a young

age, but his voracious reading and writing skills helped him survive. How Hamilton's Caribbean island nation raised money to send him to New York where he continued to rise up.

Becoming an aid to George Washington during the American Revolution and the first Secretary of the Treasury. Spoiler alert: it ends with Hamilton and Burr on the dueling grounds in Weehawken, New Jersey.

I read the Chernow biography, and I, too, was enthralled with the story of Alexander Hamilton. Ben and I decided to go to New York City and see the musical. We did a whole Hamilton thing. We went on a tour of Washington Heights where he lived. We toured his home, The Grange. We went to Trinity Church where he is buried beside his wife Eliza. And then the next day, we went to see the musical. From the opening notes I was captivated.

The first act takes the audience from his arrival in New York to his place in Washington's cabinet. The themes of always living like he is running out of time and not throwing away his shot are developed.

It's the second act I want to focus on today. It's when Hamilton's success and ego take over. It's when his entitlement and hubris begin to cost him. He believes he is indispensable to the running of the nation. He thinks he is untouchable. He believes there is no problem with having an adulterous affair, as long as he documents how the money he pays the embezzling husband of Maria Reynolds comes from his income, not the treasury.

When his political opponents learn of the affair, Hamilton writes a pamphlet detailing it all. And his wife, Eliza? She is completely devastated when she, as well as anyone else who cares to read about it, learns of his betrayal.

Next, tragedy happens when Philip, their 19-year-old son, schedules a duel to defend his father's honor. Such a ridiculous, dangerous behavior that goes back to the days of chivalry; one that should have been left behind. Philip is killed.

Eliza and Alexander are forced to deal with the immeasurable grief of the death of their son. They are living through the unimaginable.

It is more than a cautionary tale of a powerful man who believes he cannot lose that power. It is a story of displaced values. Of believing that the way our American culture measures success will be enough. Of thinking any of us are beyond making mistakes or suffering loss. It is also an amazing story of the ability of forgiveness and grace to rebuild what has been lost. It is the story of a woman, Eliza, who chooses love. It is our story, taught to us by Jesus Christ. Grace. Forgiveness. Love.

When I think of someone in Holy Scripture who in so many ways needed to know grace, experience forgiveness, receive love, it is the Apostle Peter. He, like Alexander Hamilton, had so many opportunities to shine and yet, like Hamilton—like us—he screwed up. He let self preservation rule his life. Maybe that had served him before, but somewhere along the way he lost what it meant to be a servant rather than be served.

From the moment he pulls in the net loads of fish on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus tells him to go out and fish once again, Peter becomes a follower of Jesus. He has a ringside seat for the next three years of the most important life in history.

Peter is there at the miracles of healing. He is there as Jesus brings in the marginalized and outcasts. He is there as thousands are fed. He gets out of the boat and walks on water to Jesus. He is there when Jesus is transfigured, and sees Jesus with Moses and Elijah. He asks questions. He stumbles over his assumptions. He learns first hand the values of Jesus: love God and love neighbor.

Peter must have had it figured out, right? Listen to these words from Matthew 16:13-20 in The Message version.

**<sup>13</sup>When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?”**

**<sup>14</sup>They replied, “Some think he is John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”**

**<sup>15</sup>He pressed them, “And how about you? Who do you say I am?”**

**<sup>16</sup>Simon Peter said, “You’re the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

**<sup>17-18</sup>Jesus came back, “God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn’t get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I’m going to tell you who you are, *really* are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.**

**<sup>19</sup>“And that’s not all. You will have complete and free access to God’s kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven.”**

Talk about being successful. He is Peter, the rock upon which the Son of God—the Messiah—will build the very church we are part of today. The barriers which separate us from God are being removed, and Peter is being told by Jesus that he will open doors.

And yet. Now comes the screw up. Like Hamilton, Peter is at the top of his game. Chosen to lead. Chosen to influence others. Now, when he sees the cost Jesus is paying for love, Peter denies knowing this same Messiah. When he hears the crack of the whip on the back of Jesus, he cowers. When he could have stood with Jesus, he hid. He is not at the cross. He is not getting busy doing what he has been appointed by Jesus to do, putting down a foundation to build the church. He does not live what he has been taught.

Peter makes the choice to go fishing. And it is there, by the shores of the lake where they met, the resurrected Jesus Christ comes to Peter once again.

And as Peter had denied him three times, three times Jesus asked Peter, do you love me? With each asking he is taking Peter deeper and deeper into the true meaning of love. It is Jesus extending grace to Peter. It is Jesus offering forgiveness to Peter. It is Jesus saying to Peter and to you and me: out of love for Christ, feed and tend the people of God. Listen to these words from John 21:

**<sup>15</sup> After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”**

**“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”**

**<sup>16</sup> He then asked a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”**

**“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Shepherd my sheep.”**

**<sup>17-19</sup> Then he said it a third time: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”**

**Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, “Do you love me?” so he answered, “Master, you know everything there is to know. You’ve got to know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. I’m telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you’ll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And then he commanded, “Follow me.”**

And Peter did. He followed Jesus for the rest of his own life. Grace. Forgiveness. Love. Simple words with incredible meaning and power. Words

that restore life. Words that change hearts. Words that can heal our brokenness.

Jesus Christ extends grace to you and me. From the moment we woke, we have been given a day, one day at a time to make choices that will shape our lives and the lives of those we love. God's grace tells us God is reaching out to us. God wants what is best for us. God is calling us by name. I don't know what you have been through but hear this today, God is always inviting you to come, receive God's great love. Always. Now and forever God loves you. You belong to God. That is Grace.

Forgiveness. Oh that one is so hard for us. We hold on to grudges, yes. We keep lists of things we are angry about. But this is more than forgive and forget. Some things we must not forget *because* of what we have learned.

Forgiveness is about being able to live through the unimaginable. It is about finding the path forward when others have sometimes blocked your way. It is about learning to live with uneven sides and letting go of the injustices done to you so that you do not give them power anymore.

This type of forgiveness is holy work, and I mean work. It often requires the help of professional therapy. It often requires the help of a healthy community around you. In my experience it has always required the desire and decision to believe I am the beloved child of the Most High God, Creator of heaven and earth, and worthy of a better way of life.

In *Hamilton*, after the death of Philip, the Hamiltons move uptown to the home where Ben and I visited, the Grange. It says in my favorite song in the musical, *It's Quiet Uptown*, that they are going through the unimaginable. Some of you can imagine it. You know what it is like to grieve the death of a loved one, a child. You've had experiences when it seems like there is no way forward. You are wandering. You feel lost. I've been there. And maybe that is why this song reaches down into my soul and reminds me that there is a way when I feel there is no way. Grace. Forgiveness. Love. God on Broadway.