

**You'll Never Walk Alone**  
**The Gospel Goes to Broadway: Carousel**  
**The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC**  
**Rev. Jennifer Gingras**  
**August 23, 2020**

*Ephesians 2:12-22*

"Carousel" has never been one of my favorite musicals, maybe that's because it contains within it some pretty dark themes – like domestic violence and outdated gender roles. Or maybe I just don't like the main characters! It's Rogers & Hammerstein's second musical, after the wildly successful Oklahoma!

As one reviewer wrote about the movie adaptation:

*Carousel is abjectly terrible. It has approximately three things going for it: Shirley Jones (previously known to me only as Mom Partridge) is stunning, it contains some of Rogers and Hammerstein's most evocative songs about seafood, and "What's The Use Of Wond'rin" is the prettiest song you'll ever hear about staying in your shitty dead end abusive relationship because you agreed to a long time ago when you were charmed by a charmless carousel operator who argued about starting a relationship with you and then tried to get you to buy him beer. I'm hesitant to call it a 1950's musical theatre Springsteen song only because it's way too ~~goddamned~~ depressing and at least guys in Springsteen songs make an effort to be gainfully employed.<sup>1</sup>*

Certainly, with Will's creative input and Katherine's (and Olivia's) beautiful voice I may just have a change of heart by the end of this worship service. If nothing else, the final song we'll hear today will wrap up this sermon series on a good note!

In the musical, Billy Bigelow is something of an anti-hero. He's a handsome, carefree, self-centered carnival barker at a small town carousel ride off the coast of Maine. Billy's booming voice, good looks and engaging personality enable him to entice the young girls in town to ride the carousel. We learn that Bill fell in love with and married his high school sweetheart, Julie Jordan, but he was too irresponsible both for marriage and parenthood, and things did not go well.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://anothernightinfilm.wordpress.com/2016/04/27/shitty-golden-age-musical-carousel-1956/>

When he and Julie have a daughter, Billy is fired by the owner – because apparently a married guy with kids is no longer Carnival Barker material, he’s lost his flirt factor! Soon the money ran out, and Billy could not provide for his family, so he attempts a robbery in which he was shot and killed. See what I mean? Not my favorite musical.

So far there’s not much that can be said about Billy’s life that is admirable. I’ve already used the words “self-centered” and “irresponsible”, and that pretty well sums it up. What a sad end.

However, there is one thing that can be said about Billy’s life that says something about redemption, and that’s the way he loved his daughter Louise. From the other side of the veil of death, Billy saw that she was lonely, unhappy, and in danger of making some choices that could ruin her life. And though he could not communicate with her in the same ways we communicate, he found a way to reach out and help her.

So there’s this really moving moment in the musical when this fallen father, with great love for his daughter, begins to sing... listen to the words, take them deep into your heart...

*"When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of a storm, there's a golden sky, and the sweet silver song of a lark. Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart - and you'll never walk alone."*

Billy was singing to his daughter, in effect, that love will not let them finally be separated, and that he will always be there with her. Was it only a dream, or was that reality? His daughter didn’t know for sure, and neither do we.

Few things in life are more important than having people who know us, care about us, and are willing to help us. It gives us a good, warm and secure feeling to know that we are in a caring relationship with another person – whether that person is a friend or co-worker, a parent or other relative, or a romantic partner. That’s what family is supposed to be – people who know and love us and will never give up on us, no matter what.

And that’s what caring friendships are supposed to be – people we trust enough that we can unpack our hearts to them, and know they are there for us and with us unconditionally. That is what church is supposed to be when we are at our best!

In our scripture reading today, Paul is telling the church at Ephesus, that they're not alone – you are family, you belong! We can face anything as long as we are not alone, as long as we face it with those we love and love us, we can prevail.

That should come as good news, because even in non-pandemic times there are moments when we might feel very isolated. This is particularly true when someone we love has died; it is what Billy Bigelow's daughter Louise felt.

When a loved one dies, we feel the loss keenly because a part of our life has been taken away from us, and it feels like nothing can ever say or do will fill the empty space.

Our love gives us the right to grieve. And the fact is, the more we love someone, the more we feel it. The pain we feel at a loved one's death is the other side of the joy we experienced during their life. And yet, grief and loneliness are real, they are normal, they are appropriate.

But those are not the only realities. There is also the power of our loved ones influence on our life. Think for a moment of how we are shaped for good by those who love us, that's something that can never be taken away, even in death. Who we are, what we believe and value, and how we act will always bear the imprint of loving relationships, even those that have been interrupted by death.

Our memories are one of God's greatest gifts to us, that's why, when we lose a loved one, we are quick to tell stories about their life, funny and sweet moments that illustrate who they were. The good times can live on again in our memories, especially when they are shared.

"Do you remember the time when"... and someone will laugh, and someone will cry. Sir James Barrie, the author of Peter Pan, said it well when he wrote "*God gave us memory so that we may have roses in December.*"

I can't tell you what heaven is like, but I believe that God is there, and God is good. And I believe that those we love who have gone before us are there, and that we will know each other, and that we will be restored to the fullness of life and health, and that pain and sorrow and sickness will be no more.

So, we are not alone. Not now, not ever. This is what Billy Bigelow was trying to say to his daughter – he was trying to say that he loved her so much that neither time nor space has any dominion over them. That's why he sang to her that she'd never walk alone. Neither, my friend, shall we. Amen.