



# One Page Sermon

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August 14, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

The Gospel According to Broadway: *Carousel*: contrasting masculinity of Billy Bigelow and Ted Lasso

Most modern audiences would be surprised to hear that in a 1999 special issue, *Time Magazine* named *Carousel* the best musical of the 20th century. It is based on a heavy-hitting Hungarian play by famed playwright Ferenc Molnar named *Liliom* that absolutely no one thought would be the source-material for a musical. Hot off of their debut smash hit, *Oklahoma*, Rodgers and Hammerstein were intentional about picking something with darker themes. Both men considered *Carousel* to be their favorite of all their collaborations, and many (including *Time*) consider it to be their masterpiece.

Yet I think it safe to say that most casual theater fans aren't familiar with the show. While artistically beautiful, it doesn't have a mass appeal, and I think a big reason for that is the anti-hero protagonist. Billy Bigelow is one of those frustrating characters you hope will learn and grow, but never seems to. He is stubborn, chauvinistic, and violent.

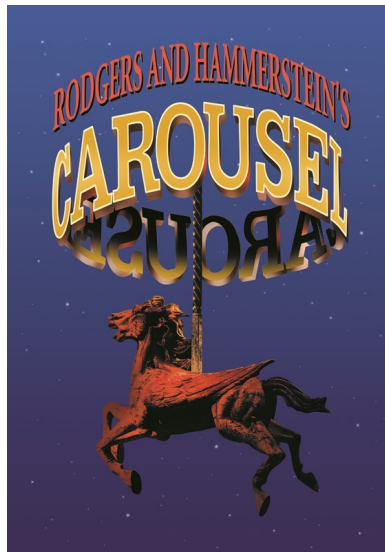
Twice he strikes women he loves. Though his first violent outburst against his wife Julie is not seen, it is a big topic of conversation among the characters. He threatens to beat up anyone who says that he "beat her," because he maintains that "I only hit her." Desperate for money (after not accepting a job offer and singing the long, chauvinistic "Soliloquy"), he commits a crime that ends in his death. Years later while in a sort-of afterlife limbo, he is given a chance at redemption from beyond the grave. Back on earth with his daughter, he once again lashes out in anger and strikes Louise (who he never met while alive) on the hand when she refuses to accept a gift.

It is after this angry exchange between Louise and Billy that a particularly problematic conversation takes place. It happens near the end of the show, when Louise asks her mother, "Has it ever happened to you? Has anyone ever hit you — without hurtin'?" As Hammerstein wrote it, Julie answers yes: "It is possible, dear, fer someone to hit you — hit you hard — and not hurt at all."

Despite the problems with the show as a whole, the song "You'll Never Walk Alone," has transcended the show. Sung twice, once at Billy's death to encourage Julie in her sorrow,

and once as the finale to encourage a graduating class that includes Louise, the song has taken on life outside of *Carousel*.

It has been recorded dozens of times by some of the biggest stars in history. Most recently, it was recorded by Marcus Mumford for the show *Ted Lasso*. It is used in the climactic scene of season one. (SPOILER ALERTS FOLLOW ABOUT SEASON ONE OF TED LASSO)



*Carousel was made into a movie in starring Shirley Jones and Gordon Macrae in 1956. The pair starred in Oklahoma in the year before.*

Mumford's version of "You'll Never Walk Alone" is used as the team loses the last match of the season. A heartbreaking disappointment, it provides a melancholy soundtrack to their devastation. In the lockerroom after the match, Coach Ted Lasso tells his team to look around at their teammates and know that "There is something worse than being sad. That's being alone and sad."

*Ted Lasso* is a beautiful television show. If you don't mind some profane language, it is one of the best shows I've ever seen. In season one especially, Ted is the opposite of Billy. He is emotionally mature. He is vulnerable. He is compassionate. He is even-tempered. He exudes a strength and masculinity that is seldom portrayed in pop culture. Ted is able to share his sadness with others. Billy is only able to share his emotion after he is dead. Ted creates a safe space of growth. Billy only grows when it is too late.

"You'll Never Walk Alone," is a beautiful song with a lesson that Billy learned too late. It is a reminder that storms and trouble are a part of life, but so are companionship, friendship, and hope. The same song in two shows at similar moments. Two male protagonists. One gets it, the other only does at the end. Billy can be a cautionary tale to men today who feel unable to express themselves. There are ways to be a man that are not violent or prideful. Invulnerability is not strength. Love is not weakness.

Sadness is a part of life. Disappointment is a part of life. Loneliness can come in moments, but the faithful man, the mature man, the strong man can know that there is no need to ever walk alone. Walk with hope and you're never walk alone.