

For the last month or so, I've found myself joining in the latest trend sweeping our nation, drawing in politicians, celebrities and everyday folks like me – and at least one other member of your choir who can take full responsibility for my obsession. It's the newest hit on Broadway – Hamilton. In this musical, writer and star Lin Manuel Miranda uses an amazing multi-ethnic cast and a wide range of music from hip hop to British pop to tell the story of none other than the 10-dollar founding father without a father – Alexander Hamilton the first Treasury Secretary of the US. Who knew that Alexander Hamilton's story would make such a great hip-hop musical?

While Alexander Hamilton is the leading character, the story is told in many ways from the perspective of Hamilton's long-time nemesis, Aaron Burr who throughout the show considers Hamilton to be an obnoxious, arrogant, loud-mouth bother. The rivalry starts innocently enough. But as their lives keep intersecting, the competition spirals. One of the shining moments of the musical is a song, sung by Aaron Burr, when he bemoans the fact that Hamilton has become a powerful, influential man in the nation's early going. Burr sings about how Hamilton is one of the only men "in the room where it happened" – making the decisions. Ultimately, Burr acknowledges that he wants to be the one who's in the room where everything is happening. Burr can't help but look sideways at Hamilton. Do you remember the end of the story? Their rivalry ultimately leads them to the dueling field. In one of the final songs of the musical, Burr describes that fateful day when he dueled with Hamilton. Hamilton's shot goes wild but Burr hits Hamilton right between the ribs and delivers a fatal blow. In the closing line of the song, Burr says, "I should have known the world was wide enough for both Hamilton and me." The world was wide enough for both of us...

I would imagine that Saul would feel some sympathy for Aaron Burr. What must it have been like for Saul – king of Israel – to hear his people sing of this young upstart David's success? Here he is, anointed king of Israel and he's being over looked because of some shepherd kid? It's not as if Saul didn't have everything going for him. He was handsome and tall, a commanding presence in any room. He came from a wealthy family and had had his share of military victories. But now all of a sudden, Saul has to share the spotlight. Was Saul merely a tragic figure in Israel's kingly saga? Tragic certainly. Was Saul a sympathetic character, one who deserves our pity? I don't know. Was Aaron Burr? Maybe they both are. But I can't help but think – Saul had everything yet he chose to look sideways, looking more at David than at himself. And the more he looks sideways at David, the more off course Saul gets. It seems that Saul – like Aaron Burr – learned the lesson too late. God's world was indeed wide enough for both Saul and David.

Looking sideways is tricky business when you get right down to it. In some ways, looking sideways is almost impossible to avoid. For instance, how many of you are on social media of some sort? Instagram with its perfect pictures of perfect moments. Facebook with its selective status updates. Vine. Twitter. Whatever you use, social media has us all looking sideways at what others are up to. It can be completely harmless. And yet, as blogger and author Jen Hatmaker says in her book "For the Love," when we're looking at someone's life on social media we see the best of other people's moments – one friend's best recipe, another's best craft, another's parenting win, and another's great vacation – and suddenly we think that we have to have all of that wrapped up into our own life. We compare our lives with the perfect moments from other's lives.

Not on social media? I'm not sure you're not as immune to sideways glances as you'd like to hope. Sideways looking happens all the time – at the gym, at the doctor's office, even at church. How many of us received some kind of holiday newsletter from friends – the year in review kind that tells us how everybody's doing so well in school and what a great family vacation they had this year? I'm pretty sure that not a single holiday newsletter went out with a summary of all the arguments parents had with their teenagers, the aches and pains and doctor visits, or that a wallet was stolen on that great vacation. It only included the good stuff. But when we're looking sideways – well, we don't stop to think about another's struggles or failures. We just see the good stuff and wonder why our lives aren't as perfect. Sideways looking creates a false sense of expectations. When all we do is compare ourselves with the best of someone else's life, it's an impossible standard. Theodore Roosevelt once wisely said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." And oh, isn't that just the truth. Comparison steals joy.

Friends, let's tell the truth about envy. Looking sideways – envy, jealousy, whatever you want to call it – runs completely opposite to what God tells us in our baptism. Sideways looking says that if there is a winner, there must also be a loser. Sideways looking says that if one is good, another must be less good. Sideways looking says if one has much, another must have less. But when I was baptized, God proclaimed me a beloved child. When you were baptized, God proclaimed you a beloved child. And nowhere in there did God say if you were declared beloved child, I somehow became less of one. In our baptism, we are called into a different economy, one of God's design. In God's economy, just because one is called beloved, another does not go without love. In God's economy, if one succeeds, God can celebrate that success without loving you any less. In God's economy, blessings for you does not mean fewer blessings for another. God does not set us up to compete with one another. And God does not compare us to one another. God does not look at one person and all their volunteer hours and then look at you and say, "Why aren't you more like that person?!" That is just not a part of God's way. But when we waste time looking sideways, we begin to live as if there is a limited amount of love to go around.

At the heart of envy lies fear – fear of not being good enough, of not having enough. In the verses following our reading for this morning, we learn that Saul feared David and all of his success. On the one hand, it is true that David had already been appointed the next king of Israel and God had already made it clear that Saul's reign would not lead to a dynasty for his family. But God had not taken the throne from Saul – he was still King and David was not. Still, Saul spent more time afraid of David than ruling as he ought. The problem is, there is no place for fear within God's economy. We do not have to fear that God will not have enough for each of us. We do not have to fear another's win, another's good fortune. Envy – and the fear behind it – draw us away from who we are called to be.

Jesus told us this truth in a parable about two brothers. When the prodigal son returns home, the elder brother stands on the outside of the house, looking sideways at what's happening inside as the celebration for his brother goes on into the night. When the father comes out to meet his elder son, the son cannot seem to grasp that when the father lavished one brother with praise, it did not mean he loved his other son any less. The elder brother looked sideways and he doubted the abundance of his father's love. Jesus never did finish the story – we never do find out if the older brother joined the celebration. But we do know how Saul's story turned out. This once proud man – handsome, strong, and powerful – spent the rest of his days going after David at the expense of his own self. He dies by his own hand, defeated in battle and defeated in life. Aaron Burr's story doesn't turn out much better; he's remembered mainly for killing Hamilton and for being a traitor, not for anything else good he may have done in his lifetime.

The truth of God's economy is one of the hardest truths for us to learn. We may be able to proclaim it – but we all struggle to live into it. When we spend our time looking sideways looking at what others are up to, when we cast envious glances at what others have, when we compare ourselves to what others are doing – we deny the most basic truth about the matchless, endless, abounding, abundant love of God.

This can be true for us as a church, too. The same economy applies. In a city where there are over 70 United Methodist churches alone, there are plenty of other churches for us to glance at sideways. We do it – we all do, checking out what someone else is up to down the street or across town. We even do it within the walls of this church, feeling as if we compete for volunteers or resources. But it's a slippery slope from looking for new ideas and success stories to beginning to compete with one another for members. Looking sideways keeps us from focusing on the mission we're all called to live out. One group succeeding doesn't imply another must in turn fail. One ministry's success doesn't mean another ministry is less valuable. When one ministry's season is ending, that is a gift of new birth for another possibility, not a time to rejoice in a failure. This isn't a March Madness tournament for churches. We can celebrate another's growth and be saddened by another's decline but there's work aplenty for us to do. The world is wide enough for us all to be about the work of God's Kingdom. Because at the end of the day, our job isn't to draw people to us, it is to draw people to God.

God doesn't want you to be like someone else. God wants you to be you. The you that God created you to be. God doesn't want us to be like another church. God wants us to be Aldersgate. At the end of the day, to paraphrase an ancient rabbi, Saul wasn't found lacking because he wasn't more like David. He was found lacking because he wasn't true to himself. Looking sideways robs us of joy. It tells us lies about ourselves. And worst of all, looking sideways tells us lies about God. Look up – not sideways. And remember that you are beloved children of God. God does not compare us but simply calls us to be ourselves, each made in the image of a Loving God. The world is indeed wide enough for all of us.