

In honor of *Hamilton* hitting theaters this weekend, it seems only fitting to present you with lines from one of my favorite songs from the musical. We are in the post-Revolution years, and all of the main players are figuring out what to do next, now that their roles as soldiers are finished. Both Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton have become fathers, their lives have shifted, they are trying to find their place in the wide world of independence and where they both land is in the world of law, but since we're dealing with these two men, we're dealing with exact opposites on how to handle every single thing that comes their way, and thus we arrive at "Non-Stop," the final song of Act I.

Both Burr and Hamilton return to New York City, finish up their studies, and become lawyers. They end up practicing in neighboring buildings to the point that they end up sharing cases. Their trajectory should be moving at the same rate, similar experiences, similar education, and yet Hamilton is just racing ahead. The music moves to the first murder trial in America where Hamilton and Burr are co-councils, and Hamilton is just going on and on and on, and Burr is like all you have to say is our client pleads not guilty, now sit down. And Hamilton *immediately* bounces back up, "One more thing!" And Burr just loses it. "Why do you assume you're the smartest in the room? *Why* do you assume you're the smartest in the

room? *WHY* do you assume you're the smartest in the room? That attitude may be your doom." And of course...it kind of ends up being true.

Throughout the rest of his life, Hamilton is *always* assuming that he is the smartest, the best person for any situation, the one person who can solve everything, but it comes at a cost. His insistence on overwork causes his marriage to crumble until the death of their son, who died in a duel defending his father's honor. When he gets caught in an extremely public scandal, he thinks the only way to deal with it is to write a pamphlet defending himself and his actions. The duel that ultimately claims his life is because he puts his opinion out there about the fact that Thomas Jefferson is the better candidate for president than Aaron Burr, even though Hamilton and Jefferson were heated political rivals. His assumption that he is the smartest in the room does get him far in life and it changes the landscape of our nation, but it also costs him everything...so ya know that old adage about assuming has some validity, whether you're dealing with 1700's America or Ancient Israel.

Once again, Jesus finds himself walking into a bit of a pickle. It is yet again the Sabbath, and because Jesus is known to do wild and crazy things on the Sabbath, the religious leaders are watching him, especially since he is going to dine with at a Pharisee's house. Jesus is like the original people

watcher. They get to this dinner and he seems to just kind of stand around and watch how everything plays out around him. He watches as people vie and maneuver for a place at the table. He watches the dynamics as people try to get closest to the most important person at the table so that they have their ear, so that they can be seen next to them. He watches as people assume they're the smartest in the room with how they're playing this political game of musical chairs, as they assume they're the most important in the room and thus deserving of the best seat, the one most deserving of being in the room where it happens. They need to know what's going on and frankly they deserve to, and to have their voice be heard in these conversations.

We've all seen this kind of thing play out, right? We've been at weddings where we've looked around and been like, well how did *they* get seated so near the family table? Why am *I* all the way back here? We've been at fancy dinners where you can see how the movers and shakers in the room maneuver and try to angle themselves to be in the best possible position of influence with those around them. We've seen, or we have been, the person trying to nudge into a conversation or be seen somewhere so that we can be like yeah, yeah, see me, right here with all the important people? I am impressive! I am making it!

This is what Jesus watches. Everyone wants something out of their host. A seat at the table, a position of power, an impression of influence. Maybe they just want to *appear* powerful, maybe they want to be able to listen in on important conversations, maybe they want to be able to give voice to their own opinions, maybe they want to manipulate their way into another dinner invitation or be able to invite powerful people to their house for dinner. With every meal, with every seating arrangement the sands of power shift and move, and you want to assume you're one of the people in the room impacted by those moves or with the ability to make those moves. It's not about relationships, it's not about having a pleasant meal, it's not about gratitude for any of it, it's about what they can gain from it. Why do you assume you're the smartest in the room? Is it because your smarts will benefit others or will it just make you look good? Do you want the seat at the head of the table so you can exact change on behalf of others or do you just want others to see you there?

Now, of course, we're dealing with Jesus and everyone there knows they're dealing with Jesus so they have to know that he isn't just going to quietly observe, eat his dinner, and leave. No, he is going to take this as a teaching opportunity. Can you imagine being the person at this dinner who has maneuvered your way to the best seat in the house and then Jesus tells

this parable? Yikes. I wouldn't just be changing seats, I would be leaving the party altogether, because Jesus basically tells the whole party that they have it all wrong—their relationships, their assumptions, their practices of reciprocity, even their behaviors towards invitations.

Inherent in all of this is a deep commentary on their relationships—their relationships with others and their relationships with themselves. Hamilton could have used to have been taken down a few pegs in his own mind, to realize that even if he *is* the smartest person in the room, he doesn't have to act like it, and he needed to realize that his actions, smart or otherwise, have deep impacts on those around him. But he can't do it, he only sees the world and his role in it, and Jesus' audience isn't all that different. They are looking at every party, every dinner, every interaction through the lens of what is in this for me, how can I benefit from it? It shows their intense focus on self and their woeful lack of attention to the world around them and their relationships with others.

So, what do we do with this message? And it's a multi-faceted answer, but I think what lies at the heart of it is asking ourselves where God is inviting us in the world? In the divine world of seating arrangements, more often than not we want to imagine that God is inviting us into places of power, places of privilege, places of importance, that we need to be the ones

edging up the table to get closer to God because well look at us, we do what we should, so we should have the bright, shiny seat next to Jesus. We want God to invite us into places of safety and ease and beauty and lounging with a glass of something delicious because clearly we have earned it. We want to say look at us, our faith has ascended, we have reached our peak, but... That is just not where God's invitation calls us to.

This gospel and Jesus' new party planning ideas remind us that we are not called into those cushy, cozy corners of the world. We are invited out into the places where light needs to be shine and hope needs to be preached and love needs to be extended. We are invited to those places where life is hard and our siblings need help and where it's going to drive us batty and frustrate us and anger us because everything is difficult, but maybe, possibly, we can make a difference. And we aren't invited into those places so that we can earn points on the divine scoreboard, to say ha ha look what I earned today, that spot next to Jesus is coming my way, and look how good it makes me feel so maybe I can get something out of this. It's not about us. It's about those that God invites us to serve, not because we want to gain something from it but simply because it is who we are.

We live in a world that is all about reciprocation, what's in it for me, what is the cost/benefit analysis to doing this thing. And y'all Jesus just

ain't in that business. Jesus is in the business of serving, of not looking at where he can sit at the table but how laden the table is with food for those who are hungry and those who are longing for an invitation of belonging, to be told you have a place here. That's what this world is about. It's not about the invitations we get to receive, but about those invitations that say, you are welcome here. The world has told you there is no place for you? Well come sit next to me, pull up a chair. This isn't about filling up our own plates with so much that we can't do anything with it all, but about filling those around us who weren't even given a plate to begin with.

In a lot of ways, our church, our community is this table Jesus is talking about, and he's daring us to extend an invitation to those whom the world ignores, whom the world tells don't deserve a place of welcome and warmth, whom the world says need to earn their place at the table first. We don't have to be the smartest in the room, but we do need to create the room where it happens...it being grace, love, radical welcome, and acceptance. There is a world of people out there who are longing for an invitation, longing for a place to be, longing for a place to rest. We don't need anything from them, but what they need from us is well within our grasp, full bellies, grace upon grace, unconditional love, and a reminder that at this table, there is always room for one more. **AMEN!!!**