



Service of  
Thanksgiving for the  
10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
the Invictus Games  
Foundation

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024

5:00 pm

**Sermon by the Dean**

**The Very Reverend Andrew Tremlett**

## Isaiah 58.6-12

<sup>6</sup>Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

<sup>8</sup>Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup>Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, <sup>10</sup>if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. <sup>11</sup>The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. <sup>12</sup>Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.



## I AM HERE

Beneath where the Lord Mayor and Prince Harry are seated, deep in the Crypt of St Paul's, is a beautiful bronze bust set into an alabaster monument. The bronze bust was the work – and free gift – of the French sculptor Auguste Rodin, the most famous of his generation, and a friend of William Ernest Henley, author of the poem 'Invictus', which Damian Lewis has just read.

You may know the story of the poem's origin,  
but just in case:

Henley was an influential poet and writer<sup>1</sup>. At  
the age of 12, he contracted tuberculosis of the  
bone, which necessitated the amputation of  
his leg below the knee by the time he was 20.

In an unlikely twist – and with gallows'  
humour - he apparently became the  
inspiration for Long John Silver in his friend  
Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

The poem *Invictus* reflects Henley's tenacity  
and courage:

*Under the bludgeonings of chance*  
*My head is bloody, but unbowed*

I know that for many of you here those words - *bloody, but unbowed* – will resonate. There will have been those days when it has been only the sheer force of will and personality and grit and determination which has made the difference between living a life and mere existence, and – on occasion - darker thoughts still.

¶ But I wonder whether the testimony given by Michelle, John and Maya Turner isn't closer to the lived reality of medical discharge, where the words most feared can be: *'Thank you for your service, but I'm afraid you have to leave.'*

Where a proud family, suddenly transformed by illness or trauma, facing a challenge never

fully anticipated, is helped *not* by noble sentiment or by being 'captain of my soul' *but* by you being here; being part of the Invictus family, perhaps when others have stepped back; finding pride and comradeship in sport; being there for one another, because only you – really, only you - can know what it's like.

So many of you here today, who carry the scars seen and unseen, will be able to say:

I AM HERE - thanks to my loved ones

I AM HERE - thanks to the Invictus family

I AM HERE - thanks to the world of sports.

But also, we want to acknowledge those of you  
who are here to support, those who say

I AM HERE for you

I AM HERE for my partner

I AM HERE for my parents

I AM HERE for those who didn't make it

And above all,

I AM HERE in the name of hope and in the  
name of a better future

¶ Looking around St Paul's Cathedral today, it's hard to believe that in the lifetime of my parents, this great Cathedral and City were in mortal peril.

During the course of 1940 - 41, 28 incendiary bombs fell on and around the Cathedral. With this landmark building a psychological target, Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave the rallying cry that "*St Paul's must be saved at all costs*".

Some 300 of those who were not eligible for military service through age, infirmity or protected occupation, formed the St Paul's



Watch, taking turns to patrol the roofs and protect this icon.

As well as those 28 incendiary devices, three bombs fell on St Paul's: two of them detonated<sup>2</sup> left their scars in the north transept and the high altar, rocking the dome on its pillars. The Madonna and Child in the Middlesex Chapel alongside the regimental colours was rescued from the debris of bomb damage to the high altar.

That those scars have healed and the fabric restored is, for me – and I hope for you – a symbol of hope in the future. A future, not

where the wounds are ignored or covered over or, worse still, forgotten, *but* one where they are recognised, acknowledged and honoured.

The range of conflicts in which His Majesty's Armed Forces and those of our allies are engaged around the world today leaves us no room for sentimentality or wistful longing for quieter days. Of necessity, the life of those serving their country occasionally entails risk and judgement, courage and fear, in ways that life outside, with all its complexities and greyness and frustrations, can never – and should never – match.

¶ Today each of you will have your own  
guiding light, the star by which you travel,  
whether a moral code or world view or  
religious belief.

I can only speak from the heart of my own  
faith in the one who laid down his life for his  
friends that we might find freedom and peace  
and reconciliation.

The one who says, I AM HERE.

I AM HERE in the love of your family

I AM HERE in the skill of surgeon and physio,  
counsellor and padre

I AM HERE when the stadium fills and the crowd  
roars

The reading we heard from the prophet  
Isaiah<sup>3</sup> speaks of how the outward symbols of  
faith have to find substance in the reality of  
action. Good intentions and well-meaning  
sympathy are not enough:

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the  
bonds of justice, to let the oppressed go free? Is it  
not to share your bread with the hungry, and not  
to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;  
Here I am.*

I AM HERE

You – the Invictus Games Foundation – live this out: not only changing lives through sport, but quite literally saving them.

So I say, roll on Vancouver Whistler 2025!

And May God bless all your endeavours.

# Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,  
    Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
    For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
    I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
    My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
    Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
    Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
    How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
    I am the captain of my soul.

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<sup>1</sup> William Ernest Henley | Poetry Foundation

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/wartime-damage-and-repair>

<sup>3</sup> [Isaiah 58.6-12](#)