

# INVICTUS

Nancy Castle's Homily, July 22, 2018

The lessons: [Jeremiah 23:1-6](#) [Psalm 23](#) [Ephesians 2:11-22](#) [Mark 6:30-34, 53-56](#)

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

Last week, there were celebrations across the globe for Nelson Mandela's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on July 19<sup>th</sup> and his favorite poem was shared on Facebook. The poem, *Invictus* was written in the late 1800's by one William Ernest Henley, as he recovered from radical surgeries on his legs.

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.<sup>[1]</sup>

We live in interesting times. Daunting times. The rise of fascism. The rise of racism. The return of Nazis. Populations dispersed far from their homes. Children ripped from parents arms.

A November and a half ago I was very devastated by the results of a political process. I feared ugliness, I feared cruelty and I feared for the future. I cried, I keened. I wailed. And then I quieted.

The layout of an imaginary magazine article came to mind, about invasion and terror in a jungle community. I visualized a two page spread featuring pictures of families fleeing; their faces contorting with screams and pain, crying, fearful babies clutched to their shoulders.

Then, turning the page, the picture was of a monk walking a path in the jungle. That was all, just walking. The greenery was lush; I could almost smell the fragrance of the plants. I knew, if, around a corner, there would be something that to needed attending to, it would be attended to. Perhaps a family calling for assistance of some sort, a drink of water, comfort at the very least. Whatever. But until needed, there was simply walking.

And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

And I vowed to be like that monk, to be unafraid and to do whatever needed to be done when it was needed to be done.

The image of the monk has served me well. It comes to me, in moments of worry and regret, and reminds me, just keep walking and being willing to deal, as all the very best monks do.

Invictus, which means undefeated and unconquered, also brings to mind images of our favorite ginger, Prince Harry, and the Invictus Games, Those are the international competitive sports events, sponsored by the Prince that gives motivation and confidence to wounded service personnel around the world. Having very little patience with war, I have always admired the games, wishing that all competitions would be done on sports fields with balls and displays of strength rather than this stupid habit humans have of killing each other over ideas or property.

Thinking of the Invictus Games also bring up those oh, so-sweet first pictures of Harry and Megan Markle together, cuddling at the Toronto games in 2017. Ah, a historical romance with commoner and prince right before our very eyes. And I can't think of Harry and Megan without thinking about Bishop Curry, our bishop, speaking at their wedding.

I watched the sermon again yesterday. What a man! What a preacher! What a walking bundle of energy and love! Makes me so proud to be an Episcopalian.

“...when you love and you show it, it actually feels right. There's something right about it. And there's a reason for it. The reason has to

do with the source. We were made by a power of love. And our lives were meant, and are meant to be lived in that love. That's why we are here. Ultimately the source of love is God himself. The source of all of our lives."

And therein lies the truth of the matter:

We are no more the 'master's' of our fate as we are---bananas. I had no 'mastery' over the conditions of my birth, grateful every day to have been born into a comfortable existence on the Central Coast of California. Fate could have made me a starving orphan many places in the world. The fate of cultural norms in the 50s provided the structure, and in many ways, the stricture of my life. I had choices, yes, as I grew older, and God knows, I'm not proud of all that I made. Some felt like fate, but many were just inadvertent consequences of carelessness and cockiness instead of rigid imperatives. And I spent a whole lot of time bewailing my 'fate,' my circumstance, making me, and others, miserable.

But during some of the worst of my personal misery, I found myself back here, at St. Peter's, the Episcopal church of my youth, listening and learning and feeling love and therefore, able to love. During his sermon, Bishop Curry shared Jesus' words concerning the essence of the teachings: "You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" Love of God, love of neighbor, love of self. Love. The power of love.

And as we became steeped in love, choosing to focus on love rather than laments of 'fate', choosing options in action and words with more care, with more love of self, we become love. Simply love. And in this way, we do

become ‘masters of our fate, captains of our soul. For we know we are nothing without His love, and with his love, we can face, well, whatever.

There is love in all of the lessons today, tenuously at times, but there. Sid did mention that homiletics’ classes recommend picking one lesson per homily, but I’d already begun the challenge of linking them together.

So. In Jeremiah, the Lord promises to ‘gather the remnant of my flock’ assuring that they will have what they need and be safe. Love given and received. In the Epistle, the word love is not mentioned, but the whole passage is about the potential peace of humanity. In other words, love between brothers and sisters. The promise of love.

The Gospel is all about Jesus’ love for his followers. In spite of counseling the apostles to rest, He responds to the needs of the crowds, teaching them “many things” and healing with his touch. Love incarnate.

To quote Bishop Curry again:

“Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in all of human history. A movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world. And a movement mandating people to live that love. And in so doing, to change not only their lives, but the very life of the world itself.”

The power of love. And the power of God’s love is established vividly in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Please locate it again in the prayer book. We will share it say it once more in a moment.

Today is my mother's birthday, she would have been older than Mandela at 105. As a child, I recall, more than once, finding her reading the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. I have no recollection of what caused her to turn to it, but I sensed the great comfort she found in its words.

We may not be as strong as Mr. Henley. When we wince, when the need to keen is strong, when the wails at the horrors of the world break free, there is 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm to recite and reflect on. For it is the promise of the love of the Lord in simple, straightforward language. Let's say it together.

### **Psalm 23**

#### *Dominus regit me*

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd; \*  
I shall not be in want.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures \*  
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He revives my soul \*  
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I shall fear no evil; \*  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; \*  
you have anointed my head with oil,  
and my cup is running over.
- 6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, \*  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.