

JESUS CHRIST'S MINISTRY
AT ST. TIMOTHY'S CHURCH

Presented by The Rev. Ralph W. Bayfield, D.Min.+,
September 11, 2022, Services at 8 and 10:30 a.m.
St. Timothy's Church, Herndon, Virginia

I want to thank the Rector, Charles Cowherd for inviting me back to St. Timothy's Church today. It was 40 years ago in 1982 when the new St. Timothy's Church was consecrated. The Rector at the time invited his long time friend, mentor and Bishop of Delaware, The Right Reverend J. Brooke Mosley to preach at the dedication service for the new St. Timothy's Church sanctuary.

As I wondered what to preach about today, I thought I'll share remembrances from Bishop Mosley's sermon at the dedication of the new St. Timothy's Church in 1982.

Bishop Mosley in his sermon, used excerpts from the then recent film *Chariots of Fire* about two runners. The movie *Chariots of Fire* depicted super human effort by two of the finest British athletes in the 1924 Olympics, Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams.

-2-

Eric Liddell, a Scottish sprinter was born January 16, 1899 in Qing, China to Christian missionary parents. Following boarding school near London, he graduated from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Eric Liddell had strong Christian religious convictions. In the 1924 summer Olympics, the devout world record holder Eric Liddell refused to run in his favorite 100 meter heat when he learned it was to be run on a Sunday. Instead he competed in the unfamiliar, longer 400 meter race that was run on a



weekday. He took first place winning the Olympic Gold medal in that event.

Eric Liddell returned to China in 1925 and served as a missionary teacher until his death in a Japanese Concentration camp during World War II in 1945. Legend has it that the whole British Commonwealth mourned his passing.

-3-

Eric Liddell's life calls attention for us today that our talents in school, sports, work, church, community engagement, at home or whatever, are coupled in our lives with our Christian faith and the responsibilities that faith requires of us.

The other *Chariots of Fire* runner was Harold Abrahams, an English Jew, who ran to overcome the huge prejudice that he experienced. Harold Abrahams was at Cambridge University from 1919 to 1923. Before Cambridge, Harold Abrahams served as a Lieutenant in the British Army. He won the Gold medal in the 100 meter race in the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

In spite of the widespread anti-Semitism of the times, Harold Abrahams became famous as a leading booster of track events throughout Great Britain.

The prejudice that Harold Abrahams faced reminds all of us today, that we Christians must never be racially, religiously nor sexually prejudiced against another person who is different from us.

Always respect people for whom they are. - Never - show prejudice against a person.

The two British runners are symbolically representatives of the *Chariots of Fire- Super Human Efforts* of people of any age.

At the dedication service of this building, Bishop Mosley had to think for a moment- Oh yes, *Chariots of Fire*, it came from the Bible, Second Kings chapter 2 about two of the greatest prophets, Elijah and Elisha. The Biblical event that *Chariots of Fire* described shows Elijah leaving his son, we're not talking biological son, but follower. Elisha, as the Lord is about to take Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind. The pair are traveling from Gilgal to the Jordan River.

Upon reaching the river, Elijah, called upon the Lord. Then he took his mantle, rolled it up and struck the water. The water parted on both sides so Elijah and Elisha could walk across the river on dry land.

-5-

When they reached the other side, Elijah says to Elisha, "Tell me what I can do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha requests that he be given a double share of his father Elijah's spirit. A double share of his spirit!!

"That is a hard thing to pass on," Elijah tells his son: yet if he sees his father as he is being taken from him, Elisha will inherit double the spirit of Elijah. If Elisha does not see his father, the spirit will not be granted to him.

Elijah and Elisha walk on until in the middle of their conversation the climax strikes like a sudden wind storm. A fiery chariot and its fiery team of horses suggesting the



fire of theophany, the fire of the Holy Spirit of God and
6 of 8 separate the two. Elijah ascends in a whirlwind to
Elisha kept watching, and cries out,
“Father, father! The Chariots of Fire, The Chariots of
Israel and its horsemen!”

-6-

Elisha sees his father being taken from him, which is the sign that he shall inherit his Father’s spirit.

When he could no longer see his Father and the chariots and horsemen of fire have gone on, Elisha realizes he must move on. In preparation for receiving the spirit of Elijah, Elisha tears his own clothes in two. He picks up the mantle of Elijah that has been left. Elisha shouts, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” Elisha strikes the water with the mantle, the water is parted and Elisha crosses on the dry land on his way with his new ministry. He now has the power of Elijah’s spirit. This power is really the Holy Spirit of God that as come and passes to the next generation, from Elijah to Elisha the son with super human effort.

And the people of St. Timothy’s Church, all of you must move on with super human effort, the Holy Spirit and your many ministries of community engagement.

You have an outstanding, talented friendly Rector, The Rev. Charles Cowherd, who was well trained to be a Priest and minister at the influential Church of the Good

7 of 8 Shepherd in Burke, Virginia. He is a fine, friendly person, skilled in pastoral ministry. That is caring about people.

I have learned that The Rev. Charles Cowherd has already reached out to many people in significant visitations. He ably exercises his service as Rector and together with you, the many people of the congregation, St. Timothy's Church will move forward in the one ministry for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As your former Rector of St. Timothy's Church for 18 years, I was fortunate to follow and get to know as a friend The Rev. John Henry, who incidentally was President Franklin Roosevelt's Private Secretary in the White House during World War II. I was privileged to witness the outstanding Rectorship of The Rev. Brad Rundlett, who followed me for 21 years. Peace, love, and God's Holy Spirit be with you Charles, and thank you for your friendship.

Thank you, all of you for the pleasure of your company. May God's blessings and many mercies be with all of you.

Amen.

