

Address by Howard Friend for the Sunday before Lent

Mention 'Chariots of Fire' and most of us will think of that Film. The Vangelis sound track and the runners striding out along the sea shore.

(By the way – hope you enjoyed the clip. We had fun filming it – on our allotment. Incredibly we only had one take!)

Those heroic young men: Harold Abrahams fighting Oxbridge anti-Semitism. Eric Liddle, the Christian Missionary who wouldn't compete on Sundays - both winning Olympic golds against all the odds. Stirring stuff.

I've always liked Eric Liddle's description of his sport: Do you remember that bit? 'God made me fast, and when I run I feel his pleasure'. Unlike most of us who when we run - feel out of breath!

The Film title, I understand, was taken from the Blake poem which with Parry's music and Elgar's orchestration is commonly known as Jerusalem:

Bring me my bow....

Bring my arrows...

Bring me my Chariot of Fire

Which in turn comes straight from the second book of Kings - our scripture reading today.

This is a story not of individual Golds – but rather a sort of relay race with the emphasis on handing over the baton.

Great drama: Elijah disappearing into the clouds in his Chariot of Fire witnessed by his protege Elisha, who thereby qualifies for a double portion of his Spirit. And immediately proves his worth by parting the waters of the Jordan with the cloak just as Elijah had done before. (That bit immediately follows where our reading left off.)

I'm tempted to call it : A Steep Yearning Curve!

But on a serious note. This extraordinary story of 'The Light Fantastic' has made me think about how we pass on to the next generation what we know about God – or what we presume to know of him. I'm going to use the word mentoring to describe this one to one transmission (And we're not talking viruses here – for a change)

Mentoring - It's been on my mind a lot recently. (And I realise that the modern use of the word often implies a less didactic and more 'getting alongside' role for the mentor) than is implied in this story - which in a way suits my point.

Did you notice how Elijah was trying to get rid of Elisha as he did his valedictory tour. I'm going to Bethel Elisha -you stay here. Nope - I'm coming with you. And so on several more times.

Elijah had probably been mentoring Elisha for some considerable time – and he just wanted a break. I well remember that feeling with Medical Students, who I enjoyed having with me for the most part. But sometimes, perhaps at the end of a busy week, just wanting them - out of there -with their constant questioning - so I could just finish the job and get home.