

Observance of the Week for 21 Feb 2010: Eric Henry Liddell, Missionary, 1902-1945

Observed 22 February

Thanks to the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell is known to most of us primarily as a runner, a gold medal winner and world record breaker at the 1924 Olympics, the ‘flying Scotsman’ with a unique running style. However, Liddell has been added to our calendar of remembrances not because of his athletic feats, or even because of his refusal to compete on the Sabbath, but because of his ‘labors in the fields of the Lord’. Eric was born in China, the son of Scottish missionary parents. Although he and his older brother were educated in



Scotland, including a distinguished degree in ‘pure science’ from Edinburgh University, Eric returned to China not long after the Olympics. He began his missionary work as a teacher at a school for the children of wealthy Chinese families. The accepted strategy was that by educating the future leaders of the society and steeping them in Christian values, one would have the greatest effect on the society as a whole. For his first several years, he was simply a teacher, but was ordained during his home leave in 1932, and continued as minister and teacher on his return. His wife was also the child of missionaries, and their own children were born in China, but as the Second World War worsened and foreign nationals were being brought home by their governments, Florence Liddell took their children to her home country, Canada. Eric, however, chose to remain at a rural mission station where he served the poor among the Chinese peasantry. In 1943 the Japanese interned everyone at the station along with members of a nearby mission school. Liddell is remembered fondly by survivors who had been children in the camp for his kindness and encouragement, which helped them to carry on, until his death from a brain tumor just months before liberation. Eric Liddell’s life has been the subject of numerous inspiring biographies for youth and adults, as he continues to inspire people in Scotland, China, and all over the world.

“The Eric Liddell Centre in Edinburgh is dedicated to inspiring, empowering, and supporting people of all ages, cultures and abilities, as an expression of compassionate Christian values.” (The Mission Statement of a center dedicated to his legacy:)

Lessons Isaiah 40:27-31; Psalm 18:21-25,29-34; 2 Peter 1:3-11; Mark 10:35-45

Collect God whose strength bears us up as on mighty wings: We rejoice in remembering your athlete and missionary, Eric Liddell, to whom you gave courage and resolution in contest and in captivity; and we pray that we also may run with endurance the race set before us and persevere in patient witness, until we wear that crown of victory won for us by Jesus our Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.