

Assembly 24 November 2008

In the blink of an eye

Christopher White, aged 18, from Stamford in England, was playing for the town's rugby club when he was seriously injured. It was about ten minutes into the second half of the game when the accident took place. Christopher was in the front of the scrum when his head apparently struck the shoulder of one of the opposing team players. Christopher's neck was broken and the damage to his spinal cord meant that he was left a paraplegic. The young rugby player has no feeling in his legs and is confined to a wheelchair.

Li Yiu-fan, aged 13, was knocked down by a bus and killed instantly as she crossed Lower Albert Road, opposite the Peak Tram station, earlier this year. The young teenager was killed when a tour bus careered out of control in Garden Road, crashing into five taxis, two cars and a van before ramming into the east wing of the Government Offices. The driver of the packed bus apparently lost control when the brakes failed. He tried to slow the vehicle by steering it into crash barriers on either side of the road but with no success. Yiu-fan was on her way to join her classmates going on a school camp.

In the case of Yiu-fan one might say she was unfortunate to be "in the wrong place at the wrong time". Traffic accidents happen and innocent people are often the casualties. In the case of Christopher White, one might say that he too was unfortunate given that serious rugby injuries are rare. However, playing rugby does have its risks and for young Christopher the consequence was a life changing injury.

Our lives can change in "the blink of an eye".

There will people in Hong Kong who left home this morning to go to work but will return home this evening with no job. The financial crisis is beginning to bite and the number of unemployed will continue to rise in the weeks and months ahead. No job means no income; resulting in great stress on families as they face an uncertain future.

There will be other people today who will find out that they have a serious medical condition. Again, their world and world of their families will be turned upside down "in the blink of an eye". One moment there is joy and laughter, the next moment there is worry and despair.

We live in a world where nothing is certain. Earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, typhoons, fires and famine affect the lives of millions of people. Cars collide, planes crash, buildings collapse, trees fall, machinery malfunctions.

Because uncertainty is ever present and is part of our everyday lives, we should prepare for the future in faith and hope. St. Matthew wrote about the Parable of the Sower, a story that Jesus told his disciples. (You will remember from last week's assembly that a parable is a simple story but with an important message). There is no better story in the Bible for preparing oneself for the future.

The Parable of the Sower tells of a farmer who went out to sow the seeds for a new crop. As he scattered the seeds some fell on the road and were quickly eaten by birds. Some seeds fell on stony ground where there was little soil. These seeds quickly sprang up but had only shallow roots. When the sun was up, the young plants were scorched and withered away. Some seeds fell among thorns. The plants that did grow were later choked by the thorns and died. But the seeds that fell on good soil sprang up and yielded fruit, bringing forth a bountiful harvest.

So what does this story mean?

It is a story about sowing the Word of God. The seeds that fall on the road represent the people who hear the Word of God but dismiss it straight away. The seeds that fall on stony ground represent the people who hear the Word of God but only shallowly. They accept the Christian message but reject the word when things get tough. The seeds falling on thorns represent the people who also hear the Word of God but allow the sins of the world to choke their faith. However, the seeds that fall on good soil represent those people who not only hear the Word of God but also truly understand it. For these people, the Word of God will bear fruit.

It is important that in this uncertain world we are open to the Word of God. We should prepare ourselves for the future, whatever that might bring, by placing ourselves on fertile ground from which we can grow. It is by putting our trust in the Lord that we will live an eternal life.

J.R. Kennard