

1. It could have been me.

Luke 12:6-7 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

I've lost count of how many conversations I've had with people about where we all were last Wednesday. Many people – my own family included – have worked out exactly how many minutes we were from direct contact with Derrick Bird. Tragically, too many others have been denied even the opportunity to reflect.

Most of the time we assume that we are in control of our lives. But, clearly, we are not. No amount of money, skill, strength or intelligence could have helped me if I had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. The realisation that we are out of control has rocked many of us deeply.

So who, or what, if anyone, is in control? Was it sheer luck that we missed him by minutes? Do I have only random chance to thank?

The Bible doesn't answer those questions as fully as we would like. It certainly doesn't tell us why the ones targeted were targeted. But it does give us very much more to trust in than sheer chance.

Jesus tells us that God knows how many hairs are on your head. That's because he made you. You have never slipped out of his care, even in the toughest times.

Let me introduce you to someone who believed that deeply. Just see what impact it had on his life. He was a general in the American Civil War. His name was Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson.

He got that nick name, "Stonewall", from his part in the first major battle of the war. His army were facing defeat under heavy gunfire and artillery bombardment. Jackson's own superiors were warning of defeat. But Jackson stood firm, leading his brigade to the brow of a hill. There he stood, firm.

From further back in the battle lines the commander could see Jackson. He shouted out to the fearful troops: "Look, there is Jackson standing like a stone wall. Rally behind the Virginians".

A few days later, Jackson was asked the secret of his courage. His reply can help us in West Cumbria today:

"Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me... That is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave".