

5th August 2024

Accidents

"Accidents will occur in the best regulated families."

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

Among the many interesting terms used in *Le Tour de France* cycle race (which I followed avidly through three weeks of July) such as *Domestiques*, *Drafting*, *Flame Rouge*, *Hors-categorie*, *Musette*, *Maillot Jaune*, and many more, a new one caught my attention this year: *Road Rash*. It's one of the few that's in English and not French, and it's a catch-all term for the cuts, scrapes, bruises and rashes which riders get when they've been involved in an unfortunate cycling accident.

Some of the crashes in *Le Tour* happen to solo riders – taking a corner too fast on a downhill stretch, skidding on a wet road or colliding with "road furniture"; others happen in a "multiple crash" – a pile-up of many riders, where the *peleton* is travelling so quickly the cyclists can't avoid hitting each other and lots of them go down. It must be dreadful to be part of. And seeing riders continuing in the race with torn Lycra, bandaged arms and bleeding thighs, or having to abandon because of a broken collarbone or worse, is a tough watch.

Accidents happen, of course, in the best regulated cycle races as much as in the "best regulated families". I had an accident myself recently. I tripped on an uneven paving-stone and fell my length. I got a badly twisted ankle – which has taken some time to settle down – and a bit of "pavement rash". But thankfully, no bones were broken, and I was able to hobble to the station for my train home. Apart from feeling silly and somewhat sorry for myself, what I remember most was a passer-by coming to offer help. He was a young man, and I don't even know his name. He asked how I was, stayed with me while I checked myself for serious damage, put a hand on my shoulder to wish me well, and waited till I limped off. It was spontaneous and helpful, thoughtful and kind.

If "accidents will occur in the best regulated families" (and elsewhere like *Le Tour*, or Edinburgh's dodgy pavements) let's thank God that caring can be offered when it's most needed, individual and corporate, unprompted and professional, restoring and inspiring, named and anonymous – and always comforting, and *absolutely* necessary.

A prayer for today

If I need help sometimes, help me to help others in their hard times too. Amen