

Inauguration Ceremony of the Electrical & Electronic Engineering Association HKU

Address by Ir Frank CHAN JP

Early this year, Hong Kong had its coldest day in 59 years. The cold spell sparked off heated discussions in town. While there were complaints that we were not well prepared, there were views that we had over reacted. From time to time, people are often caught by surprise and troubled by climate change, not knowing how to respond, much less to control.

Fame

Recently, climate change became a focus in Hollywood. After five previous nominations, Leonardo DiCaprio finally won his very first Oscar Academy Award for Best Actor. He dedicated the first half of his award acceptance speech to his best friends and loved ones. While many would expect him to continue expressing his deeper feelings, DiCaprio instead chose to remind people across the globe that "Climate change is real, it is happening right now."

DiCaprio's endeavor as environmental activist began in 1998 when he established the "Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation", the mission of which is to protect the Earth's last wild places. His dedication to combat climate change grows over the years, and is best illustrated by his appointment as a United Nation climate change representative. His closing message "Let us not take this planet for granted. I do not take tonight for granted" resonated clear and loud within the Dolby Theatre where he was honoured.

Wealth

Our natural habitat is not the only place vulnerable to climate change. In 2008, a tsunami devastated the global financial market. Many companies filed for bankruptcy, many billionaires lost their fortune, and millions went jobless, homeless, and hopeless. Even the world's most renowned investor, Warren Buffett, was not immune. 25B USD or 40% of his net worth was washed away.

Despite the treacherous climate in the investment world, Buffett is always among the richest. Little do we know about his recipe for years of resilience, but most of us would appreciate his frugal lifestyle. He drinks Coke, eats hamburgers, and lives in a modest house that is half a century old.

Making money is not what Buffett really after, for he holds the strong conviction that by accumulating wealth, he could then do the most good by redistributing it to the needy, and he has pledged to dedicate 99% of his wealth to charity during his lifetime or at his death. Clearly, Buffet's success is not the triumph of his own.

Power

Back in early 1860s, the political climate in America turned severely rough. "All men are created equal" is perhaps the best known quotation from the US Declaration of Independence. Yet the very same declaration did not hold for the millions of slaves prior to 1865. As the movement to abolish slavery continued, views polarized, tensions heightened, and eventually culminated in the outbreak of the civil war.

Near the brink of disintegration, it was Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the America, who finally put an end to slavery and brought peace to the nation. Lincoln was hailed by the black as their messiah. In close encounter with a black man who dropped to his knee to show gratitude, Lincoln responded "Don't kneel to me.", "That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank Him for the liberty you will enjoy hereafter." Being a white man with the power over the nation, not only did Lincoln refuse to take advantage of his position and exploit the black, he rose and fought for what he thought was righteous, and led his nation out of the storm.

Value of life

Some describe life as a coin. You can spend it anyway you like, but you can only spend it once. To engineers like me, life is very much like a vector. A vector has both magnitude and direction. No matter how it goes, vectors having the same start and stop are equal. Irrespective of the twists and turns, life always starts from birth and ends in death. From the perspective of vector, lives are inherently equal. However, it is the processes that make lives unique from one another. The value of life is not so much about fame, wealth or power but the selfless use of what we have and what we can do to serve, to make a difference and to create values for others.

On 4 September 2016, Mother Teresa will be canonized as a Saint. Throughout her entire life, Mother Teresa had dedicated herself to serving the poor and those in need. She has created homes for people who, in her own words, "feel unwanted, unloved,

uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone.”

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” She said. “At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done.” Instead, we will be judged by “I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.” “A life not lived for others is not a life.”

Please accept my warmest congratulations to all of you who venture to serve in one way or the other. No matter here and now in the University and elsewhere in society, it is going to be a humbling experience and a loving memory of life uniquely for you. Please enjoy.

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