

“Call no man a saint until he has suffered.”

We had prayed for a house to begin a work for the Lord. We did not look for one, as even if we had found what we wanted we would not have been able to buy it. But we prayed and trusted and trusted and prayed. We were very good in those days at praying fervently and then opening our bibles for a word from the Lord. We know that there are dangers in this but it worked for us then. One day, three verses from Deuteronomy seemed to leap from the page of the bible. It was, “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs ----- a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees ---- a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing.”¹ We had many a discussion as to where this “good land” could be.



One day a friend of ours went into a book shop in Liverpool. By chance (it appeared) he met an acquaintance who asked him if he knew of anyone to whom he could gift a house for Christian work. Our friend wasn't sure but he rang us. That is the beginning of the story that brought us to this beautiful peninsula. We delighted in these verses that God had given us, there was “a vine” around the door of our first house and when we moved to Redacre there was “a spring” of water underneath the house. That had its problems but they were solved. It was “a good land” and we “lack nothing”.

What we didn't do all those years ago was read the rest of the chapter or if we did we didn't take it in. “Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord, your God disciplines you”. Discipline comes because God is concerned that we become a holy people. In our cloaks of piety we can be blissfully unaware of the unbelief, grumbling, self-pity or pride lurking in our hearts until that is, we are led into a desert. Our wilderness may be difficult relationships, illness, grief, loneliness, failure or disappointments to name but a few. “Call no man a saint until he has suffered”,² wrote Dr W E Sangster and he tells the story of a member of one of his churches regarded by others as something of a saint until illness struck. They could hardly believe it was the same man; he was such a difficult patient.

In contrast, we have an account of a visit to the Desert Fathers in 374AD by a friend of Jerome. “Quiet are they and gentle. They have a great rivalry among them; it is who shall be more merciful than his brother, kinder, humbler, more patient”.³ Their lives centuries later challenge ours. They possessed a quality called holiness.

¹ Deut 8:7-9

² “The Pure in Heart” W E Sangster

³ “Desert Pilgrimage” James Wellard