

# The Pilgrimage

**Jim Smith**

**Gaze on my timelessness  
and rest secure.**

**All is well  
and all is well  
and all will be well.**

This material is based on an imaginary pilgrimage from the North East coast of England to Holy Island, where the Monks of Aiden and Cuthbert lived. Holy Island is an island once every day, when the tide covers the Causeway to a depth of the height of an average car. Alongside the Causeway there are a series of posts, which mark the old Pilgrim route to the Island. We are going to follow those posts and see what we can learn about following Jesus.

This material was originally used as part of the live stream from The Pearl Mission Base, Accra Ghana during the height of the Covid 19 crisis. It has been written by Rev Jim Smith. All the material, including the poems are written by Jim Smith. Some of the poems are in the Celtic tradition, which, in Northern England is valued highly.

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# 1. Keep your eyes open

Here we are at the shore. We can see the Causeway stretching ahead and Holy Island in the distance. The marker posts and the mud stretch before us. As we step onto the mud to begin our long walk, there is something we have to learn at the outset.

Some years ago, I was doing a video shoot on Holy Island. We went across the Causeway, and intended to stay one whole cycle of tide, so we would be cut off until teatime. The crew wanted 3 shots - one in the church, one in the ruins of the Monastery and one from Gregory's island. I suggested that we do them in the reverse order. Gregory's island was about 200 metres off shore, and gets cut off by the incoming tide. But they had their plan and they were going to do it their way. We did the first 2 shots which as usual took forever. After lunch we went to the shore. I was to stand half way between the shore and the island, and do a piece to camera with the whole of the bay behind me.

We took a long time to set it up, and then, when they were ready I said to them - "I will have to come 50 metres nearer you. The tide is over my shoes!" They were not happy because this ruined their shot, but they had no choice but to reset everything. By then the tide was even deeper and I said "I will have to come 50 metres closer. The tide is over my shoes again" More unhappiness and more reset. By then, the tide had cut off the Island and I had to do the piece standing on the seashore! There was much gnashing of teeth, but as I pointed out to them, they were so set on getting stuff from the church and ruins, that they did not notice the tide.

We can easily be like that in our walk with the Lord. We have to focus on what he is asking of us of course, but at the same time we must be aware of what is going on around us. We may have to make little adjustments to our walk as the Lord just gently turns us a little to the right and a little to the left. If we are too fixated – and no one can be more determined than me – the tide will come in and fill our shoes! We will fail to achieve what the Lord wanted and have to accept second best!

The Bible teaches us "Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left. (NLT) Be sure to be listening, or the tide will cut you off!

Sometimes following can be a bit difficult. Thinking about this, I wrote -

**Lord  
sometimes it gets very hard  
to walk in your footsteps.  
They seem so deep  
and I have such little strength.**

**“Do not be afraid.  
Press on with me.  
When it gets too tough  
I will carry you.”**

## **2. No surrender!**

On we go into the mud. It's best to keep close together then we can help each other along - and anyway that's what pilgrimages are about - helping each other along. The second post is close.

I wrote some material about England and I set up a four centre tour. The plan was for me to share, followed by discussion and prayer. Very basic! At the first church, I did what I said I would do, and after the meeting the people were very frosty. I was left standing like a fish in a tree, so with my colleague we left and moved on to our next church - a long drive for us. I knew the Pastor here and I expected a good meeting. I was in for a surprise.

As soon as I had finished, the audience were off like a shot! When I got back to the Pastor's house, everything was a bit strange. The next morning I was to speak at a joint house group event but the Pastor said at breakfast "I think I had better do that today. I expect you will be gone when I get back." It was a kind of "Here's your hat. Don't bang the door as you leave." I couldn't make it out, as I had only done what I said I would do.

The third Church did just as I had asked and it went well. I was encouraged. What was going on wasn't to do with a defective project. At the last church, I was told "We begin at 7.30 and you can begin at 8.15." I suggested that for once we did not have a long worship time, to give me more time for discussion. Answer "No!"

I finally got up to speak with 20 minutes remaining. There was no way we could have the talk, discussion and prayer. Afterwards I found that they had not put my books on their book table, they had "forgotten their cheque book so could not pay for my fuel and "We are going for coffee!" The implication was clear - "Please don't bother to join us!" I didn't.

Later I asked the Lord what was going on during this tour. "Why" he said "What is your problem. I thought it went really well. I thought you were right on target. Excellent!" "But Lord" I said "they all showed me the door. Why?" "Ah that" he said. "It wasn't them it was you!" I reached for my tin helmet, expecting a divine rocket but he went on - "What was the beginning of the third paragraph of what you had written?"

Alarmed that he had such a detailed knowledge of what I had written, I hastily tried to recollect. "I remember. The nation has compromised itself." "Exactly. And you are not a compromiser are you? You have a 100 percent commitment to following and serving. You are totally uncompromising." "Yes" I said. "I don't see any other way." "But they have all compromised themselves. They wanted things to be easy, comfortable and undisturbing. You disturbed them. So don't worry. But don't expect any thanks!"

I didn't get any. I met the first church at a Conference I was speaking at some months later and they avoided me. The second church decided that "The time was right to consider their giving," so I could forget it! The last church did have the grace to write and say they thought they might have got things wrong.

Isaiah said this – "Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left." He didn't say "Follow when it looks easy, but if it looks hard go and have coffee." Jesus was even more blunt – "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me." "And" he added to me, "If you don't do this to the uttermost of your ability, you are not following but drifting along in some bubble which is of no use to me!"

If we are not totally committed, we will not survive this Pilgrimage or the Christian walk. We will disappear in the mud of compromise.

I love this poem, written in the Celtic style, where “three” is a common theme. It speaks of holding and loving - a good reason for not compromising!

**Hold me  
three of my love  
intimate union  
in the warmth of your hand**

**Protect me  
three of my love  
sharp spears breaking  
at the cross of my hope**

**Help me  
three of my love  
glory on glory  
by the peace of your heart**

### **3. I am the way**

Keeping watch and not giving up - what next?

I was touring in Suffolk - a very rural area of the U.K. At the end of yet another evening meeting, I was told –“You are staying with a lovely lady in a nearby village. Her house is 3 down from the Post Office. It’s only 3 miles away.” What could possibly go wrong with such instructions! We set off, and wandered around the villages of Suffolk, trying to find the place we “could not miss.”

Finally we came to the right village but finding our night's lodging was going to be a problem – there were no street lights and we had no torch. So we parked the car and by a bit of searching found the Post Office. But here was our next problem. There were houses either side of the Post Office so which was number 3?

We went to what we thought might be number 1 and felt for a number on the gate. We did not want to knock someone up at what was now 11.30. I just hoped no one saw us. I didn't want to explain to a Policeman - "Yes Officer, but you see we have no torch and..!" By a process of feeling each gate and number, we arrived at what we thought might be number 3. But what to do now?

I tapped. Nothing. I knocked. Nothing. I had once worked with a policeman and he had shown me what a Policeman does to get attention – I hammered the door as hard as I could! A light came on, but our troubles were far from over.

A voice said "Who's that?" "Jim from Saint Elizabeth's - we are staying with you tonight." The voice replied "I don't know you." "But how many people called Jim from Saint E's are you expecting tonight?" I replied. No good. So I popped my card through the letterbox. The voice again - "This could be anyone!" I had a flyer from the meeting with my picture on it. I put it through the letterbox, which had now become our main means of communication. "But I can't see you" said the Voice. How do I know this is you?"

I replied 'Well, how about we give up and I sleep under your hedge then?" That seemed to move us on. "Look through the letterbox" it said. I peered in to see two tiny eyes peering back at me. I obviously looked an honest man, and we were let in by an elderly lady who looked after us wonderfully. Finally - sleep.

What I learnt here was that when I set out I had my instructions, but the detail I had to work out for myself. There were many twisty and turns between "Go to the village" and sleep. I had to be prepared to use my imagination and experience to finally arrive. This is how it works with the Lord. He says "I am the way" and these words are in this Post, but he doesn't tell us how to walk it. We have to use our faith and begin. Then as we go along, he can adjust us a little here and little there until we arrive.

There is no heavenly telegram at every junction. We have to believe that he is "The way" and walk it in faith. In this way we grow as Christians. We learn to read the signs as we go along, and become mature followers.

Many Christians never act because they are waiting for him to send the plan. Such a plan will never come. We need to accept that "I am the Way" will lead us, and then in faith, step out. If we do, despite many mishaps, we will arrive.

Another poem in the Celtic style, which believe strongly that God would lead if only we would follow.

**Gently now  
to bear the burden of the world  
is too great a pain**

**Gently now  
to ask to share his heart  
is an easier way**

**Gently now  
be gathered to his heart  
and let him light  
the lonely path  
with hope**

## **4. Getting unlost!**

So now we know we must keep a wider lookout than just in front, be committed and believe he is the Way. Then we are ready to move forward. But what happens if we get lost? At this next marker post, we have a choice. The main posts go forward, but there are some going off to the right. Which to take? The ones on the right are the tricksters! They are posts put out by Fishermen to hang their nets in the incoming tide. That way leads to disaster for us. But what if we do go the wrong way in our journey? What then?

I set out with a German friend to speak at a conference Centre in central Germany. I asked my German friend "Do you know the way?" He said "I do." We were soon on the main road and after some hours, turned off into the forest. The Conference center was just a few minutes from the road.

After 15 minutes the trees were closing in on us and I asked "Are you sure about this? You said the Centre was just a few minutes from the road." Teutonic silence. 25 minutes later with the path hardly wide enough for the car, we rounded a corner and drove straight into a bog. The front of the car sunk up to the wheel arches. We are well and truly lost. What did we do? Here is what I did, and here are the principles of what to do when things go wrong.

First we stopped. When we have lost the way and are in a hole, it's best to stop digging! Pride must not drag us deeper into the bog.

Next we worked out where we went wrong. We rang the Conference Centre and soon realised we had turned right when we should have turned left.

Our next step – not to play the blame game! My friend was waiting for a lecture from me, but I said "Look, it doesn't matter that we have gone wrong. It happens. Let's get ourselves back on the right track." The blame game just wastes time and energy. We didn't deliberately get lost, so why blame anybody?

We needed a plan to get back on the right track. We could not go forward and he was for revving the engine and driving backwards in Teutonic fury! I didn't agree. We needed a sensible plan which would slowly but surely get us back. I dug trenches behind the rear wheels, filled them with stones and gently reversed out. Continuing backwards, he walked with his mobile phone held up and I followed him carefully. The plan cannot always be quick but it has as its aim - getting back to the start of our error.

Suddenly he veered off the path into a small opening and signaled me to reverse. But the ground looked bad, and so it proved as he sunk up to his knees! Beware the "quick fix" as we reverse back. They may look good but there really is no alternative to a slow return to the start.

Finally we arrived back at the main road, and this time we tried the other turning and within 5 minutes we were drinking coffee in the Centre. Going wrong is not a sin. It happens to all of us. Fortunately, there is a simple plan to put things right. Praise God!

This is just a poem of optimism. We are going to need it as we move to the next post.

**In joy  
he gathers up his love  
into a bouquet  
and throws it at me.**

**I catch it  
and fragrance fills my life  
beauty fills my heart  
colours brush my soul  
with the glory of heaven  
I dance in his delight  
will this never end?**

**"Never!"**

## **5. Ouch**

Now we are in the middle of the crossing. The mud is very deep here because this is where the tide flows strongly. Most people fall over here! This post is not an easy one – it's called "Ouch."

When Mary fell pregnant with Philip, we were very excited. But the pregnancy was a difficult one. Many things were not right and we went often to a special clinic where I noticed that other women were losing their babies. Then one night- 27 weeks into the pregnancy, Philip was born and went to be with the Lord 3 hours later.

I was devastated. All that prayer and all that support and for what? Mary was very fragile, the children very upset and me? I had to lead the services at Church on Sunday. I was a single handed Priest, and though I was raising a team, I didn't have one then. It was a hard Sunday. I remember saying to the Lord "I'll preach it but never believe it again." The months that followed were very difficult. I had to care for Mary, the children and the church. It exhausted me. Some friends lent us their holiday home in the Scottish borders, and one morning I went out by myself. It was raining and misty. I went down to the stream and was so angry.

I screamed, turned the air blue and threw stones into the river and raged at a God who had at my greatest moment of need failed me. Finally the storm blew itself out, and I said "Lord I am so sorry." His reply was simple. "Don't worry son. That's what friends are for, isn't it?"

Then I did some thinking. I was going to suffer – like it or not. So I could choose. Suffer with him or without him. I thought about a life already spent in his service, and I thought "I might as well stick with him." It wasn't much of a faith decision - the poem I wrote is at the end of this story.

Ouch! I've been to Ouch and paid. I am still paying. It's a very hard post to face, but sadly, we will all face it at some time. We can choose how we respond, but we will not escape the pain. Can we survive? Will faith be sufficient? Will the Lord prove a safe haven or a false dawn? I'm still struggling with these questions.

Ouch. We meet this pot at the deepest and most treacherous part of the crossing. All we can-do is hope, and for me, sometimes, even that was not enough.

But Ouch is part of our journey - part of the Pilgrimage and part of all our pilgrimages. Perhaps knowing others have been here will help those who follow. Want to scratch your name on it? "Michael was here?" There is little else we can do but make our mark and pass on. For Ouch is just part of the journey, not the whole story.

Here is the first poem I wrote. I call it "faithless turning." It was very low on faith, but it was enough for a God who loves without strings attached.

**I tried to find  
something to fill the gap  
so that I would not be so empty  
but I cannot find anything to fit.**

**In the end I turned to you,  
not because I wanted to  
but because there was no one else to help.**

**It was a faithless turning  
but it was a turning.  
The hill was steep  
steeper than before.  
Now I have to climb**

**“Yes” he said “but not alone.”  
He took my hand in his –  
a broken hand and held me tight.**

**“Together” he said.**

Here is the poem called “Rage.” For me, the pain of loss was so intense. It felt like I had broken glass in my heart and every time I moved it dug deeper into me. I could not escape, but I couldn’t find any way to let it all out - or anyone who would share it with me. What a lonely place grief is. Jesus offered his hand, but I wasn’t sure I wanted it.

**What is that sound?  
Where did it come from?  
It disturbs me.**

**What is that sound?  
It tears the air apart.  
It alarms me.**

**What is that sound?  
Such pain and damage  
such agony  
such rage  
such loss  
such bewilderment.**

**What is that sound?  
It's me screaming -  
screaming with rage  
at a loss I cannot understand  
and a pain I cannot heal.**

**Who will listen?  
The man with  
the broken hands  
stands by me.**

**"I will" he said.**

Finally, back to the beloved and peaceful Celtic stream.

**"Lord most holy Lord  
most soft and tender  
Caress my pain.  
Heal my wounds.  
Rest my agony in your hands  
for a while."  
"For a while" he replied.  
For a while - peace**

## 6. Go gently

Now we move away from the main channel, and we could do with a gentle post- which is good because this one is called "Go gently."

I came to Banneux in Belgium. It is one of the apparition sites of the Virgin Mary. Briefly, a hundred years ago, a young girl called Mariette, was looking out of her window when she saw a lady in the garden, calling her to come and meet with her. She told her mother, but was scolded! But when she looked again the lady was till there. In the end she went out and knelt before her. She discovered that the Lady was the Virgin Mary. Over a number of weeks, Mary appeared again, and on one occasion led Mariette to a place where when she dug down with her hands a spring came up. The Virgin Mary said to her "This spring is for the healing of the sufferings of the Nations."

Over the decades, I calculated that millions of people had gone to that spring to pray for themselves or their friends. My wife Mary and I were planning to do the same. We came first to the small chapel built where Mary appeared. There was hardly room for the two of us! I had so many things in my mind to pray about, but as I knelt this strange soft gentleness drifted into my heart. It was nice - but I could not pray.

Then we went to the spring where Mariette had been led, and there was a lovely small pond where the spring still flows from a very ornate slate pillar. I put my hand in the flow - as everyone does. I had a long list of people to pray for who needed healing, but as I began this soft gentleness came again! It was lovely, but I could not pray. I wondered what was going on.

We wandered along the "Way of the Cross" path and came to the outdoor Sanctuary where about 200 people could hold a service. Mary went off and I sat down to pray. But it came again - that soft gentleness. It fell like snow falling into my heart and brought a great peace.

So I said to the Lord "What's happening here?" "Well son" he replied "I saw how many things were on your mind and how hard you were working. I saw all your anxieties and troubles, so I thought I would send you my gentle soft love, just to give you rest and joy."

What a lovely blessing. I can still feel it whenever I want to feel it. It has lingered and is always available. How nice to find it here at the Post called "Go Gently." We all need this from time to time - especially after "Ouch." Just the gentle softness of his love touching our battered hearts. We press on, bash on, struggle on and that's O.K. But every now and again we get weary. The Lord knows this. And so he sends the soft love. Let's "Go gently" from Post six, gently receiving this beautiful gentleness into our hearts. This will give us courage to carry on.

Here is one of my favourite poems which speaks of gentle love. I nearly made a typo there and wrote "Gentle Lover." On the other hand, perhaps that's what the poem is really about.

**Softly you come to me,  
falling on me  
like snowflakes,  
drifting into my soul,  
healing my wounds  
with love.**

**Softly I reach out for you,  
longing  
with all my heart  
to know your touch.**

**Softly,  
I fall asleep  
into your arms**

**Softly forever**

## 7. Gifty

We can see the shore now, and the small town on the Island. We could go straight up the beach and into the town - think cream cakes and coffee! What does this post, called "Gifty" teach us about that?

When I was 10, I wrote my first poem. It was awful, but I liked using words to express my inner feelings. I carried on writing, just for myself. Then when I was at University I bought a guitar and learnt to play. I was very average! One day the Lord said "You could take your poems and write a song!" "But I could never do that" I replied. But I did and slipped my song into some worship I was leading, so that no one would notice. Afterwards someone came up to me and said - "What was that song you used in the middle? It was lovely. I want to use it!"

Then the Lord spoke again. "That was great. You could do more of that!" I was doing a lot of university work with Christian Unions, so I put a little sequence together to help illustrate what I was teaching and it seemed to go well. I left singing and poems after that and went off to be a Vicar. But when I joined a national organization in the Church which encouraged evangelism, I had a little more time. The Lord said "Why not put the poems and songs together in a 2 hour evening "But who will come?" I asked.

But I did write "God does love me then" and began to tour with it. That's when I began to see what the Lord was doing. I was allowing people to "feel". So much of our faith in the U.K. is intellectual. But we are emotional people and faith flows from within those emotions. There are so many who feel that they should not express them -I don't know why. I could help them with the poetry.

Then the Lord spoke yet again. "Why not put some of your poems in the things you are writing?" But I could not see it. How could I write on the Greek of Mark's Gospel and use poems! But, as always with the Lord, it did work and now my writing is read all over the world and so are my poems!

Now I work as a missionary in Ghana, and I am an amazingly young 72. So the days of "On a tour of one night stands, my suitcase and guitar in hand" are long gone – I thought. But two years ago the Lord said - "This is what I want you to do now. I will show you lots of little incidents. You write a poem about each one and then tour with them." I replied "At my age? Surely those days are behind me!"

But I found, as usual that raising objections with the Lord is a waste of time, so I wrote "Poppies" and I am still touring with it. Amazingly it has had a good impact. I went to a retirement area, and I was the youngest at the event, yet these beloved mature citizens were as touched as everyone else.

The point of this is the name on the Post - GIFTY. After Ouch and Go Gently, I wanted to sit down and think. But the Lord said "Son, over there on that Island there are hundreds of people. I have given you gifts to serve them. I know you are hurting, and I am doing all I can to help you. But you were called to serve. You will have to serve even though you feel "Ouch." I have given you the gifts haven't I?" Yes he did – 62 years ago, and if I had refused to write that first poem I would not have this wonderful gift to use today.

"Gifty" is telling us that whatever has happened to us, we are called to serve and we all have gifts. But Gifty is also warning us that if we do not take those gifts and use them, they will disappear and the greatest loser will be me - or Him? We are called to use what we have.

I was sitting in Durham Cathedral one late November afternoon. It was getting dark, and the light was small. It was very atmospheric. Then I wrote these two very Celtic style poems and I think it fits nicely at Gifty.

**Surrendered  
to his will  
servants of the light  
yield to his longing  
and in the mystery  
obey**

**"Speaking light"  
Gently it rises  
this light love of my life  
soothing me to wake  
and worship.**

**Powerfully it calls me  
this love light of my life  
energy of creation  
urging me to follow**

**Softly it calms me  
this light love of my life  
day's ending  
soothing me to sleep.**

**Quietly it watches  
this light love of my life  
eternally protecting  
rising over life and death  
securing me**

## **8. Trusty**

We could go from Gifty up onto the beach and into the small town, but we are going to turn right and go to Gregory's island. We can't see his cave from here so how do we know it is there? There is a Post here. It's called "Trusty", because we have to trust others who tell us that the cave is round the corner. Trusty is quite a challenge.

After Philip died, it was almost inevitable that Mary and I would want another child. Not to replace the one we didn't get, but to meet some deep urge that we cannot really explain. One day, in our local Surgery our Doctor and friend said to us

"Listen. Mary is getting old in child bearing years, and you have a lovely family already. Perhaps its time to consider having no more children." Very sensible advice which I totally ignored and in the fullness of time Mary fell pregnant with Stephen. Then it began. We would have to walk the same path all over again – the same one which had ended so badly. Every twinge, every scan, every day was a remembering. The Lord asked me one day "Will you trust me with this child?" "No" I said. "How can I?" "O.K." he replied and we left it at that.

Finally the day came when Mary had a Caesarian section and Stephan was born and taken immediately to the special care unit. Mary and I sat alone for 3 hours - exactly the length of Philip's life. During that long watch, the Lord spoke to me again about trust. "Will you trust me with this child?" He asked. I thought about it and then said to Mary "This time must be different." So we prayed "Whatever comes Lord, no baby, a special need baby or whatever, we will trust you."

Our Consultant was a woman and she was wearing high-heel shoes. As we sat, and three hours passed, I heard, in the distance, the faint "Clip clop" of her shoes. "It's time to trust" I said to Mary. "Clip clop" got louder and louder and then stopped outside our room. The door opened and the Consultant put her head round the door - and had a huge smile on her face. "We are going to make it" she said.

Trusty is not quite as challenging as Ouch, but very close. It's relatively easy to trust in small things, but not so easy to trust when trust seems to have let us down. But this is what faith is about. When we trusted and it failed, are we willing to trust again? Or are we too damaged to take the trust risk? Trusty is one of the deeper challenges of walking this path. No matter how many times we walk it, there is always risk, but only ever the same Posts. Can some of us get past Trusty, or are we too badly hurt to see that it is really an act of love and not an act of judgement? I have always found this difficult, and still do.

**If I call**

**Will you hear me?**

**If I fall**

**Will you catch me?**

**If I slip**

**Will you hold me?**

**If I drown  
Will you save me?  
If I'm hurt  
will you heal me?  
If I cry  
will you love me?  
If I'm lost  
Will you find me?  
“Yes.”**

**“How can I be sure?”  
“You can’t.  
You will have to trust.”**

## **9. Beware the world**

Gregory, like Cuthbert wanted solitude to pray, so he found a small cave just off the coast - a few hundred metres across the stones when the tide was out. This was his place - lonely, windy, and wet, but quiet. He could see the Monastery across the land, but he had his place. Standing there, I thought “I wish I could live in such place, but I have to live in the rough world and try to build churches with little encouragement. It looks easier for him. I was wrong.

I met a Pastor at a Conference in Europe and he invited me to his church. It was a nicely maintained building, good leadership and committed members. They made me very welcome, listened attentively and over coffee and generously blessed my work – which was good as I had, as usual, no fuel!

Two years later I went back and it was just as nice - very welcoming, strong leadership and good membership, but I sensed that something not quite right.

When I was back in my room, I asked the Lord about this feeling and he said "Let's think about this. The Pastor?" "Very nice" I said. "An Evangelist I think." "The leadership?" "Very welcoming." "But did you notice any new leaders?" "No I didn't." "And have any of them left?" No. "And the members - any new ones, any left?" Suddenly I saw it. Nothing had changed at all. Usually in two or three years there are some changes, but here it was just the same. I asked ""What is going on here? Nothing has changed." "You'll figure it out" said the Lord, rather cryptically.

I had dinner with the Pastor and his wife that night. I asked him how he came to be Pastor of this church. "I was an Evangelist" he said, "and I came to this town to do a Mission and there was a great response. Those who had responded came to me and asked me to be their Pastor. They offered me a flat, a car, a good salary and as much support as I needed."

"So" I said "You sold out your evangelist calling and took the money?" There was a long frosty silence and then I knew I was right. "So you have established this church, though you don't know how to. Now it is frozen in time and will eventually die because you do not know how to build it. You are an Evangelist not a church planter." No return invitation to me has ever come since.

This was Gregory's problem. When the tide receded and he was hungry and cold, it was a short step to the Monastery and dry clothes, food and company. Before long he would stay 2 days, a week, a month, a year? And his calling as a solitary intercessor would go from him. The world is always ready to dilute our calling and to corrupt our service. And it always seems so reasonable. But surrendering to the world means the dilution of our service and ultimately the death of any calling. This Post is well named "Beware the world."

St Paul put it like this - "As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. (Gal 6:14 NLT) I wrote this -

**You bear the burden of your world  
and I see how much it hurts you.  
I want to help, by bearing it  
that your hurt might cease,  
but I cannot.  
Why will you not let me  
end your pain?  
“Crucifixion never ends  
for those who truly love.”**

## **10. I belong**

St Mary's church on Holy Island is a lovely place to go. It is not ornate or fancy in any way. Just a lovely Island church. It is the oldest building on Holy Island, the only building that retains work from the Saxon period. It is very likely that St. Aidan worshipped on this site from arriving in 635 AD. There is a post here called "I belong."

I was at a Conference and a Pastor of a church in a very tough area of the city came up to me. "Hello Vicar" he said. "I couldn't ask you to my church." "Why not?" I asked. "Do you shoot Vicars?" He laughed and said "No – but we are a bit W.C." "Oh good" I replied. "I like wafers and cornets!" I think he liked my humour and a few weeks later I duly turned up at his church. I did wonder whether my car would be there on my return - it was a very rough area. How had he got a church going here where almost all of us have failed?

I walked in and there he was with about 30 of his people. "Look everyone" he said. "The Vicar is here. Let' give him a cheer!" An unusual welcome, but very nice. We got under way with singing - the music being supplied from a record on an ancient record player. I am still convinced that we sang "We'll met again" with Vera Lynn, but they all enjoyed it!

Then before I spoke the Pastor said "Now Vicar, we are ready for you. We are all born again Christians here. You don't get in if you are not. But first we are going to have the quiz. If you can recite last week's memory verse you get a bar of chocolate."

Unfortunately I couldn't as I wasn't there last week, but most did and settled down, chocolate in hand to listen to me. I opened my Bible, but before I could speak the Pastor was up again. "Excuse me Vicar - everyone the Fish and chips have arrived - don't worry Vicar, we have some for you." The smell was overwhelming. I felt I was preaching inside a fish and chip shop.

But they were a great audience. Very attentive and very responsive. It was a delight to speak to them. When I sat down the Pastor was overjoyed. "Ah what a great message. We'll love to have you back again." Then it was fish and chips, bread and butter like doorstops, beans, mushy peas, tomato sauce and buckets of tea. We all piled in and it was a real family affair.

When I left and drove home I got to thinking - how had he done it? Here in the middle of a tough area, with people who do not usually darken the door of a church he had built this family. Yes – that's it. He made everyone feel they belonged – they were all part of the family.

That's what this post is saying. We are not alone, however alone we feel. We are never abandoned and we are never orphans. We belong - we belong to the Lord and we belong to his people. We are family. Our names are written on the palms of the Lord's hands. I think we should all scratch our names on this post, just so we do not forget.

**Like a feather on the wind**

**I drift in the breeze of your beauty.**

**I rise into the radiance**

**Glory transfigured into love**

**Caresses, heals, values, cherishes**

**Stillness beyond words**

**Home at last**

# 11. Holy

On Holy Island the Monastery has been there since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Abandoned during the period of Viking raiders, it was eventually rebuilt – only to be destroyed by Henry 8<sup>th</sup>. In the monastery we can feel Celtic Christianity all around us. The sea, the sky, the hills, and the green grass – all speak of our Creator God. The monks have prayed this ground holy. But what does this post mean to us?

I was in Iceland. I got some Christians together and we planned to climb a mountain which looked out over a lake. It was, to the Icelandic people, a holy site. We were going to pray at the top of the mountain and then throw the cross as far as we could across the lake. The man chosen to do the throwing was an Icelandic weight lifting champion. He had strong arms, but to our delight, when he threw the cross, it caught an updraft (or an angel?) and sailed far out over the lake before dropping into the water.

One of the team had a camera. In those days it had film in it, not chips as we use today. All the way up she was taking pictures, and it began to annoy me. Before I could make any comment the Lord said "Now don't go using your well known lack of tact here. It will upset everything. Leave it to me." As we climbed the last 20 feet to the summit, she said "I have just taken the last picture. Wait a moment so I can reload." Putting her hand in her pocket she found that she had left all the rest of her film in the car. I looked at her and said "Sister, some things are too holy to photograph."

What is so special here in the ruins of this Monastery is the holiness which seems to be in the air. It brings a great sense of the greatness of God – he is different, bigger, and wiser than me. He has seen more and done more. My Holy God is truly great. In the holiness of Lindisfarne monastery with its sense of the eternal, the holiness of God comforts us. It puts all our struggles in context. Our holy God is bigger than them all, yet embraces them all and holds us close. Here in this place of peace, we can reach out and touch the face of God.

I wrote this poem with the ruins in my mind and the towering blue sky over me. I was greatly comforted.

**Please be bigger,  
greater, stronger, wider  
So I, your little flower  
can grow in your garden.**  
**Then storms can blast the mountains  
and tear up the ground  
shouting “We are great!”**  
**But I, your little flower,  
small and delicate  
safe  
in the beauty  
of your holiness  
secure  
can flower**

Then I was overwhelmed with all that was good in the Celtic faith. I wrote this poem called - “Touching the face of God.” I think, for me the Irish Monks who lived in the Celtic stream were looking over my shoulder. I hope they were nodding in agreement!

**Longing so much  
to know you  
I know  
my empty hands  
can never fulfil  
my heart’s longing**

**You came to me  
and held me  
into yourself**

**I felt the heartbeat  
of all creation's longing  
and knew I belonged**

**In that stillness  
I reached up  
and touched the  
face of God**

## **12. Anastasia**

It's been a long journey! From being reminded not to be too narrow, - commitment, the way and going wrong. Ouch, Go Gentle,Gifty. Trusty was a challenge, the world, belonging and then Holy. There in the Celtic stream we touched the face of God. And now today?

We are standing on the seashore, looking across the Channel. To the north lays the North Sea. Storms rip down here regularly. These are beautiful but dangerous waters. To sail them takes a very sturdy craft and tough sailors. No one in their right mind would set out from here in a Coracle - a small round boat made out of reed and willow, circular, small and designed only for rivers. But when the Irish monks of the fifth century wanted to build a new church they got into their coracles and put out to sea. It was madness and many of them drowned. But just one or two came to land and they called that place "The place of resurrection." There they built their church and carried on.

That's us, as we finish our Pilgrimage. We are moving every day ever nearer the place of resurrection. As our life passes, we are not in decline. We are closer. I had this unusual picture. I saw a beautiful diamond. It was called "Anastasia", which is a name sometimes found in Russia. It means "Resurrection." While I watched, the Lord broke it into a million tiny fragments, took one of them and placed it deep within my heart. "One day"

he said "that will be you, an Anastasia - a beautiful diamond of resurrection. Then your real pilgrimage can begin!" Onwards to glory!

Here is my Anastasia poem.

**Sometime it seems so far away**

**- hope**

**my tiny craft**

**lost on a sea too big**

**for me.**

**I am small and frail**

**But then I see you**

**walking, calling**

**and I know**

**there is a home for me**

**I am not cat adrift**

**but moving ever closer**

**to my harbour**

**where**

**in peace**

**I can stay forever**

**And so I sail on**

**frail but hoping**

**One day...**

# **Turning for home**

Now the Pilgrimage is over. It's lots of hugs, tears, laughter and remembering. Lots of exchanging addresses, phone numbers, WhatsApp's and e mails. We break up and take with us memories which will delight us for years to come. Perhaps we have resolved some things, or at least begun to glimpse a way though. Let's move on.

**I look at the wreckage.**

**Did I really do all that?**

**Is my life such a mess?**

**Maybe.**

**But the sun has come.**

**Time to begin again.**

**I'm hoping**

**for a better day.**

## **Jim and Mary**

Jim and Mary have been working in Ghana for over 30 years. They began their ministry in Corby where Jim was assistant Curate, before moving to the North East a Vicar of two ex-Mining Parishes. Following a time with the Church Pastoral Aid Society and secondment to Mission England, they began their work in Africa. They have been married for over 50 years and have 6 children and 8 grandchildren. They live in Ghana and also East Sussex, U.K. where Jim is licensed to Chichester Diocese. They attend the local Parish church in their village.

Jim can always be contacted on WhatsApp (07803 617435) or by mail - [jimsmithghana@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jimsmithghana@yahoo.co.uk)

Our websites are [servingafrica-mission.org](http://servingafrica-mission.org) and [belovedmissionaryschool.org](http://belovedmissionaryschool.org)

## **Serving Africa Mission - Supporting us**

During our Pilgrimage I have mentioned many of the projects we run here in Ghana. Just click on one of our project links to find out more.

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