

## 14. These things don't happen here?

### **Genesis 3:22-24**

And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

This is the Bible's account of the moment paradise was lost. A sinless, deathless garden behind them, ahead lay the cursed ground, the thorns and thistles, the arena of sin and death. But on a sunny day in West Cumbria – days like 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 – it *looks like* we are back in Eden.

I often wonder what it must have been like for the adventurers who discovered pristine new islands; I've speculated myself when arriving in New Zealand, which is relatively unspoilt and so recently inhabited: perhaps here at last is a place where the norms of sin and death do not apply!

But since the moment we were kicked out of Eden, there is no where on earth where we can be free of our great enemies, sin and death. It sounds too obvious to need saying, but in practice many people have illusions about their location.

Many of the early puritans who emigrated to New England were wildly optimistic that in their new land they could set up a less sinful society than they had left behind them. Alas, they were disappointed.

Because I have moved up here from London, people are often interested to know what I make of this area by comparison. I love it here. "It's quiet", people say, approvingly, "Everyone knows everyone else".

During my time here up until last Autumn, there three national news stories about Whitehaven: the digital switch over when we were chosen as the first place to be switched off precisely because we are a quiet area, the overfilled wheelie bin and the white van lowered into the harbour as a lover's revenge.

Since then West Cumbria has been very much in the national news. We have learned in a painful way that even though this area looks like Eden, it is not. We too are exiles from the perfect place. We have been forced to acknowledge that we too are a community capable of harbouring violence.

The good news is that as God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, he had in mind that humanity would one day get back in again. One man, on behalf of everyone else, would brave the swords of judgement and win us the right to eat from the tree of life again.

Jesus was that one man. The Bible calls his cross "The tree", to make the link with this account from Genesis. Through his death, in a place of ugly execution, he gained access to the tree of life, and entry into a beautiful, deathless, sinless future.

Beautiful though West Cumbria is, on its sunniest day it is still only a faint taste of the real paradise we look forward to.