

**23.4.2017 St John with St Mark, Bury**  
**Easter 2. Acts 2:14a, 22-32. 1 Peter 1: 3-9. John 20: 19-end.**

I don't know if you remember him or have heard about him, but back in the 1980s and 90s there was a bishop of Durham by the name of David Jenkins. David Jenkins was a figure of some controversy and notoriety. At the height of Margaret Thatcher's power, the bishop described her policies towards the poor as being quite wicked. The bishop saw government policies as impoverishing the poor and making the rich richer. Historically speaking this is quite true. For the bishop, to treat the poor in such a way was quite wicked. Then there was the year long miners' strike. David Jenkins gave support to the miners of his diocese, but not Arthur Scargill, the miners' leader. David Jenkins described the head of the Coal Board, Ian MacGregor as being an 'elderly American import'. MacGregor was actually a Scot who had worked in the USA.

In terms of theology, David Jenkins whipped up a veritable storm. He talked about Easter in terms of not believing a God who did 'conjuring tricks with bones'. The phrase, 'conjuring tricks with bones' stuck; that the bishop was outlining better ways of believing was missed.

Now David Jenkins had had a serene and peaceable journey to being the Bishop of Durham. He knew from an early age that God in Jesus loved him, and loved, therefore, the world. Jenkins had a steady academic career ending with him being Professor of Theology at Leeds University before becoming bishop of Durham. He was used to analysing situations and trying to discern where God was in any number of new contexts. It was normal to take a critical view of the resurrection. The 'conjuring trick with bones' God had been overthrown in the 1830s with the publication of Strauss's History of Jesus, the first attempt to write the life of Jesus according to contemporary historical methods.

David Jenkins wanted to understand the Gospel of Christ in the light of the great progress made since the nineteenth century. If the secular world had progressed so should the Gospel and it hadn't. David Jenkins was endeavouring to get the Gospel to be truly relevant to what was a new context. This meant tackling social issues, such as poverty and the miners' strike, and the strictly theological ('conjuring tricks with bones'). He wanted to be able to speak not merely to church-people but to those on the edges of the Church, and those far from the Church. He wanted to challenge the power of atheism and win back truth for the Gospel.

In Durham diocese, people were divided by David Jenkins. But I always found him to be a highly prayerful, thoughtful, considerate and humanly warm person. He was my kind of bishop.

In our gospel reading we had the story of Thomas. He was not present when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. Their story of a resurrected Jesus seemed utterly fanciful. Thomas's journey as part of the inner circle of Jesus' movement had been marked by a certain detachment. When Jesus turns towards Jerusalem for the final conflict of the Passion, Thomas says, somewhat edgily, 'Let us go with him to die'. It is not surprising that Thomas, when he hears of the resurrection of Jesus should argue back that unless he puts his hands in the wounds, Thomas will not believe.

The following week, on another Sabbath, the day when in Communion we see Jesus in bread and wine, on another Sabbath, the disciples and Thomas are gathered together. Jesus appears to them and invites Thomas to put his hands into Jesus' wounds. Thomas says, 'My Lord and my God'. Thomas, seen as being the greatest doubter is vouchsafed to give the greatest theological understanding of Jesus. That

somehow Jesus is God. John's gospel finds its climax in this saying, 'My Lord and my God'. John is working in his usual way of putting together contrasts.

David Jenkins raised questions about the resurrection that enabled us to deepen our understanding of the resurrection. The resurrection was no longer to be seen as being a conjuring trick with bones. Rather the resurrection was the power of God which changes lives, changes hearts and minds and renews us. Resurrection is the power of transformation. That is what David Jenkins was saying. It is the power that enables people to live as Christians in their ordinary and sometimes highly complex and difficult lives. This is what David Jenkins was saying.

Thomas had to be himself and discover the resurrection in his own terms. Simple report was not enough. Thomas had to encounter the living Christ not to find proof of resurrection, but to encounter its height and depth. 'My Lord and my God'.

Each one of us here is being asked to try and work out for themselves what resurrection might mean for you. We will all have differing visions of resurrection, and it could be that each vision is actually true, even when they contradict each other. We may not join Thomas in saying 'My Lord and my God'. Our responses will be quite different. But we shall add to the kaleidoscope that is the Kingdom of Heaven. And then we can take resurrection into understanding how we live our ordinary lives and make heaven here on earth. Amen.