

## About these talks

### John Bell

John Bell is a member of the Iona Community, a minister of the Church of Scotland, and a well-known broadcaster and speaker - he is a regular contributor to Radio 4's Thought for the Day and has spoken and preached throughout the English-speaking world. As a hymn writer and an advocate of music in church he has also sung and encouraged thousands of people to sing and to learn new songs. John never shies away from the challenges the Bible makes to us and he is startlingly adept at hearing and articulating the promises the Gospel offers us, often from a point of view or in a tone of voice we never expected.

John was to come and speak in Derby Cathedral through Holy Week 2020. The coronavirus lockdown has made that impossible, but we are very grateful to John for supplying the text of his talks, exploring the story of Christ's Passion, Cross and Resurrection with us, asking 'what does this say to us now?'

The talks will be posted on the Cathedral website each day through Holy Week. They have been slightly adapted for reading instead of listening. John has supplied more Biblical references than he would have used otherwise, so there is plenty of Biblical material here – take your time and ponder on it. There are also points for further reflection at the end of each of the first three talks.

On the next page you will find a short introduction to the first talk, setting the theme: the consequences of being human.

# The Consequences of Being Human

*The Incarnation is widely associated with Christmas. But the Word did not become flesh for one day or season only. In these talks we consider the risk which God took in being one of us and one with us in Jesus.*

John Bell

## Introduction

Some years ago I was working in an Anglican church in Nottingham. There was an arrangement with the local school that at Christmas and Easter, children in Primary 5 would come to the church building where members of the congregation would stand in different parts of the building and re-enact or tell the story of the events surrounding the birth and death of Jesus. Children were encouraged to ask questions of these characters, be they shepherds, Herod, Mary Magdalene or Roman centurions.

One pupil had been required to repeat year five. When Holy Week neared and he was taken for a second time to the local church, he was overheard saying to one of his fellow pupils, 'I know what's going to happen. They're going to tell us about how the baby Jesus got crucified.'

For many people who have little personal contact with the church or Christian believers, the only two things they might know about Jesus are that he was born in Bethlehem and crucified at Calvary. Any additional information might come from childhood hymns about him being 'gentle, meek and mild.'

It is my firm belief that we cannot understand the immensity of the Incarnation if we apply that word only to the babyhood of Jesus. Equally I believe that we cannot understand the immensity of Jesus' death unless we understand the life and public ministry which preceded it.

Jesus was not crucified because Judas betrayed him, the Sanhedrin condemned him and Pilate ordered his execution. Jesus was crucified because his life and teaching were so threatening to the religious authorities that, to use a phrase of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's, he was "edged out of the world and onto the cross."

In this series of talks for Holy Week, I intend to take three phenomena from the experience of Jesus and look at them in turn on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Each phenomenon was controversial all through his life and exacerbated the call for his execution.

### Points to think about:

- **John Bell wrote these talks before the current lockdown added an extra resonance to Bonhoeffer's phrase 'edged out of the world'. What does it feel like to think of the events of the Passion this year? What stands out differently? What seems more important, or less important?**
- **Suppose someone asked you 'what was Jesus like, personally? What kind of person was he?' Think of the stories about what he did and said. Think of his human character. What kind of thing would you say was 'typical of Jesus' – what kind of 'phenomena' do you think John Bell is going to focus on?**