

In 1965 my dad became vicar of Aughton,

a settlement of 100 souls deep in the Vale of York.

The ancient Norman church was half a mile from the village,

no road, just a very muddy, slippery track,

which the stern Archdeacon had foolishly driven over

en route to my dad's induction.

He slithered and slid until a bullock took against him,

kicking a hole in his car door – sounds like my sort of bullock!

My dad and mum set about raising money to build a road,

hardcore which would cost an impossible £100.

We staged a wintry Christmas Fayre in our vicarage,

and then a sunny Garden Party on our vicarage lawn,

coinciding with the day England won the World Cup.

We began at 2 pm, and trade to say the least was brisk,

completely sold out by 3 pm kick-off time...

We counted the towers of money watching that Match.

‘They think it’s all over – it is now!’

shouted the commentator as Geoff Hurst made it 4-2.

We hit our target, so it was sort of all over for us too.

My dad, weary but happy, tidied away the trestles and

the unsold rock cakes, but then met his nemesis:

‘Ee, reaching your target is all very well, Vicar,

but what would thou ’a done if it had rained?’

I guess that old git was eternal, cropping up in our Gospel,

a cross between Jeremy Paxman and Laura Kuenssberg:

‘Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’

The last in a whole series of trick questions

trying to spoil the show and catch Jesus out.

Jesus turned the tables as well as overturning them.

All the world belongs to God, all things come from him.

It’s our job to render it back to him in good nick.

Dennis Potter in his play the Son of Man has Jesus replying
'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's
and unto God the things that are God's – and shut up!'

Church meetings galore, spending hour after hour weaving
narratives why things can't happen, thwarting resurrections,
when our citizenship should be in heaven.

Make things happen rather than stop them happening:
be springboards not murder boards, radiators not drainpipes.

There were lots of voices opposing my dad's road.

'Them Normans never built a road, why should we?'

The churchwarden was called Norman, in post since 1066...

'No road, no way, then no truth or life,' my canny dad replied.

I preached at little Aughton two years back and

we proudly drove up to the churchyard gate on my dad's road,
giving splenetic bullocks a wide berth.

They thought it was all over. But it had only just begun...