

Thought for the Day 7th September - John Reed

Read Mark 1:29-39

We currently have a rat problem in our garden. There are several of them (a family?) who hang around the chicken coop, presumably scavenging for food scraps left by the chook. Various traps have so far yielded little success, and we are at somewhat of a loss as to what to do next.

Which is why this news story caught my eye, about the unlikely heroes who have been saving farmers from a monkey plague.¹ The story comes out of a small town in rural Japan, where local farmers have been dealing with hordes of hungry monkeys that have been decimating their crops. Help has arrived in the form of three older women who call themselves the “Monkey Busters.” The trio use air guns and firecrackers to scare the monkeys away from the crops. Apparently, they are so dedicated to the cause that they often show up to a monkey sighting still in their aprons, not having taken the time to change in the way to dealing with the emergency. (Which makes me wonder how much time Superman wasted by ducking into a phone booth to change on the way to an emergency?)

Have you ever had a plague or infestation that you wish somebody would come along and drive out?

One of the things that the Gospel writers report that Jesus did often as he travelled around Judea in the 1st Century AD was drive out (or “cast out”) demons. Mark mentions it twice in this passage (verses 34 and 39), and it is also reported in Matthew 8:18; 9:32-33; 12:24-28; and Luke 11:15-20; 13:32. And in Mark 3:22-26; Matthew 10:1-8 and Luke 9:1 we are told that he gave the apostles the authority to continue this ministry (although according to Mark 9:18 they were not always successful).

Why is this casting out of demons so important in the ministry of Jesus? Here in Mark chapter 1, the news that Jesus was casting out demons wherever he went follows hot on the heels of the commencement of his public ministry which Mark reports in verses 14-15:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

And then in verse 39, we are told that *he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/japan-monkey-busters_n_5f495d8ec5b6cf66b2b7c9d0?ri18n=true

The casting out of demons goes hand-in-hand with the preaching of the gospel, which is the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand. The connection is clear. With the coming of the kingdom of God (and Jesus, the king), the kingdom of evil is being overcome and driven out. Jesus spells this out in Luke 11:17-22, when he responds to the accusation that he is driving demons out by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, by saying:

“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebub. ¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²² but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.”

Both in his preaching and his actions, Jesus announced that the kingdom of God had arrived, and that Satan, the “strong man,” who has been oppressing mankind from one generation to the next, has been overcome by one stronger yet. The driving out of demons is just one small example of this. The empty tomb, and the broken bonds of death, will be a more powerful demonstration. And the complete overthrow of Satan at the end of time (Revelation 20:10) will mark the completion of this process.