

Thought for the Day 6th November - John Reed

Read Numbers 22:15-35

What part do animals play in your life? Maybe you have pets. We do: two cats, four goldfish, a rainbow lorikeet, and a chook. But it's mostly a one-way street, where we are expected to take responsibility and look after them rather than the other way around. Of course, we get affection from the cats, and eggs from the chook ... but you know what I mean.

There is the rare occasion when animals are actually in charge of a situation. Here are two recent ones from my news feed, for example ...

In the small community of Rabbit Hash, in Kentucky's Boone County in the USA, Wilbur was recently elected mayor, with 13,143 out of 22,985 votes – a new record. If you're wondering why Wilbur has no last name, that's because he's a dog. A French bulldog, to be precise. And he's not the first. In fact, he has replaced Mayor Brynneth Pawltro, a pit bull who has served since 2017, the latest in a long line of dogs that have served as mayor since 1998.¹

And just in case you want to dismiss that as just a symbolic joke – that Wilbur surely won't actually take any action – try this one. In Horner, Alaska, a moose walked onto a soccer field and showed the spectators how it's done, kicking the ball around and even kicking it towards the goal (records don't show whether or not he or she actually scored).²

But surely topping doggy mayors and soccer-playing moose is this talking donkey – not the one in *Shrek*, but Balaam's one.

Balaam was a non-Israelite prophet. The Israelites were drawing near to the end of the Exodus and heading towards the Promised Land, and on the way had already defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and had their sights set on Balak, king of Moab. So Balak sent for Balaam and asked him to come and curse the Israelites. But Balaam refused, saying that he could only speak what God commands him to, and God has told him not to. Balak won't give up asking, and eventually God tells Balaam he can go – but he can only speak what God tells him to. So Balaam sets out, but on the way God gets angry that he is going (maybe he sensed that Balaam was going to go against his wishes?), and sends an angel to stop him (Numbers 22:22). The donkey sees the angel and stops, but Balaam doesn't see it, and gets angry with the donkey and hits it. Finally, God gives the donkey the power to speak, and it says (Numbers 22:28): "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" [I wonder if any of the horses in the Melbourne Cup wanted to say that to their riders?] Balaam explains he's upset that the donkey is making him look foolish, and the donkey points out that he's always been loyal and trustworthy up to this point. At which point God opens Balaam's eyes, and he sees the angel, who explains what's going on.

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/wilbur-french-bulldog-mayor-rabbit-hash_n_5fa31be8c5b6b35537e369f6?ri18n=true

² https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/moose-soccer_n_5fa04bbdc5b6501b4ba6c823?ri18n=true

The point being that God can even use animals – which we usually treat as pets, or beasts of burden, or food-producing livestock – to do his work, when we are too blind or stubborn to listen.

In Hebrews 1:1, we are told: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets ...” Funnily, it doesn’t mention donkeys! But maybe the donkey is included in “in many ways”? But then verse 2 says: “... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” That is, God has spoken in many ways, tried to get our attention in many ways – including donkeys - but now, his supreme communication has come, in the person of Jesus. And if you don’t listen to him, there is no other hope. You are even more lost and foolish and blind than Balaam.