

Monsters (not just) Under the Bed

Daniel 7:1-18

I don't remember hearing about this text in Sunday school! I remember Daniel in the lion's den . . . and Daniel's mates Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace . . . but not this story . . . this fantastical vision . . . a nightmare, really! . . . grotesque creatures . . . beasts from the depths, called to destroy and devour . . . to maim and kill . . . a terrifying vision of chaos and death.

What is there to say about this to you? To our world today? How can we relate to this vision? Surely we're more sophisticated than that now . . . surely we're beyond being worried about monsters under the bed?

Well, maybe . . . except Friday night made me think . . . on Friday night the monsters were out in force . . . whole bunches of them . . . grotesque little creatures . . . ghouls and goblins . . . beasts and vampires . . . skulls and skeletons . . . roaming the streets . . . all about this high . . . holding on to the hands of their mums dressed in their Unley best! Celebrating . . . if that's the right word? . . . celebrating a festival of the dead . . . Halloween, where the spirits of the dead are raised to walk the earth terrorizing the living.

And, that made me think further . . . the monsters are still here . . . all around us . . . hiding in plain sight . . . I'm not taking about kids in ghost costumes now . . . let them have their fun . . . I'm talking about the monsters that devour bodies and break lives and arrogantly flaunt their power . . . and you've probably got some under your bed still, you just don't talk about them . . . but, you know what they are.

They are the things that scare you to bits . . . the things that sap the life out of you . . . that drain the life from you . . . that cut you off from life . . . they are the things that are death-dealing rather than life-giving. A small freckle on the skin . . . it doesn't seem like much until it takes over your body! The smartly dressed, successful businessman whose tongue cuts his wife deeper than any backhander . . . and leaves no visible bruises. The aching, burdening loneliness of having no one to talk to . . . night after night. The whispering voice in your head that says: "You'll never be good enough".

What are the monsters under your bed?

No wonder Daniel was shaken by his vision . . . the beasts he saw were all grotesque mash-ups of creatures, but they had a human element to them. Perhaps that's why they were so dangerous . . . and so frightening! I am reminded of visiting the Auschwitz Death Camp a couple of years ago. What chilled me most about the place was not that it looked evil, but that it looked so . . . normal. Take away the barbed wire and it could be a little village with streets and trees and apartment blocks . . . a normal place where normal human beings mass murdered other normal human beings. That monster is still with us. But, it's just an extreme example of all those things that seem to promise life, but in the end only produce death.

And, we've never known what to do with death. We want to control it . . . like we try to control everything else, but we've never been able to. So, we've industrialized death . . . the mechanized slaughter of hundreds of millions of people in two world wars.

We've commercialized death . . . you can now have your loved one's ashes turned into diamonds.

We've psychologized death . . . if you need to you can work through the five stages of grief . . . and everything will be ok!

We've medicalized death . . . white, soulless room and drugs on tap.

We've impersonalized death . . . turned it into statistics . . . you know, 3 people a day commit suicide.

We've domesticated death . . . extending physical life, sanitizing dying and pushing it to the fringes so it's out of mind, out of sight.

And, perhaps most monstrous of all, we've relativized death, so now, in an age of previously unheard of material wealth and rapid advances in medical science, when faced with the question of death we can shrug our shoulders and say: "I don't care . . . we've all got to go one day".

And, maybe the monsters of Daniel's vision are more real now than they were in Daniel's head . . . for isn't that the ultimate parody of human beings? . . . the ultimate distortion of humanity? . . . when we are able to say, "I don't care"! Is it any surprise, then, that a few years ago the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found that "the aged care 'system' fails to meet the needs of its older, vulnerable citizens. It does not deliver uniformly safe and quality care, it is unkind and uncaring"!

Well, they're only old people, right? And, we've all got to go some day!

The monsters are still with us.

But, that wasn't all of Daniel's vision. There was one . . . an Ancient One . . . on a fiery throne . . . sitting in judgment over the monsters . . . having the last say on the monsters . . . and, this 'last say' included the presentation of one 'like a son of man' . . . a human being . . . presented to the Ancient One . . . and being given all dominion and power . . . over everything . . . over everyone . . . that includes the monsters . . . that includes what the monsters bring . . . that includes death! This one 'like the son of man' brings a new kingdom . . . a kingdom of life . . . life that goes on beyond death . . . forever and ever.

It's little wonder that when Jesus began his ministry in the Judean desert he identified himself as 'the Son of Man'. Here was God's Son . . . God himself . . . coming not as a parody of humanity . . . zapping the baddies . . . overthrowing the evil Roman regime with might and power . . . claiming the throne for himself . . . here was God, coming as the human being . . . ushering in the kingdom of God . . . in very human form. The ultimate expression of humanity stood amongst humanity . . . those who had been crushed, and maimed, and forgotten, and cast out, and broken . . . he stood amongst them and said: "I care". He stood with the lonely, and scared, and troubled and vulnerable and said: "I care". He stood at the graveside of his friend and wept because he cared. He stood looking out at the crowd baying for his blood, and said, "I care". He hung, bloodied and nailed to a cross and said to all humanity, "I care"! And, he showed just how much.

That's what human beings do . . . in God's kingdom . . . in the kingdom of the one like a son of man. It's what *we* do . . . as we live in God's kingdom. It's what we will do today as we remember those who have passed from death to life. Our loved ones . . . they are not a statistic . . . not even just a memory . . . they are the holy ones who have received the kingdom. As we name them we celebrate our shared humanity . . . we celebrate that we cared then . . . we care now . . . and we will care again when we are reunited in the forever and ever kingdom. It's what we do . . . it's who we are. We care.

We care because the one like the Son of Man cares for us. And, his dominion is an everlasting one . . . one that shall not pass away. His kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

You know, I reckon this text . . . this story is even better than the ones I learnt in Sunday School.

Amen.

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