

the back page - Sheth LaRue

On a warm June morning I was working on my vehicle when out of the corner of my eye I spotted something crawling through the bushes near the house. Upon closer inspection I found a pair of small, feisty, and hungry juvenile racoons. Racoons near my home were not uncommon, but seeing kits in the daylight set off a red flag: they should not have been without their mother this early in the year, nor wandering at this time of day. I fed them a few cans of tuna, gathered them into a container and took them to my brother's ranch and was able to find someone who would rehabilitate, raise, and eventually release these tiny, masked animals back into the wild.

While this was, I suppose, a compassionate act on my part, it illustrates half of my complicated relationship with animals. I view racoons as a nuisance. They're nicknamed 'trash pandas' for a reason, destroy expensive horse supplements and cattle feed, and don't mind rooting through cellars in an attempt to find something easy to eat. While these two racoons were saved, I knew that I'd be chasing off their relatives and cursing their existence later that week.

I grew up in a family that loves animals – we have pets and livestock that we care for without question. We are also a family hunts, passing down the knowledge that hunting is not a sport – it's not a competition, it's not a game, and it's not to be glorified. I was taught early and often that there is no joy in killing another creature, but that this event is necessary to my family, my existence, and my life.

I live in a complicated place – on one hand I love and admire animals, yet on the other hand I am one who kills them. How do I, as a Christian, justify my killing of God's creation? Is my evil (is this even evil?) justified because it prevents a greater evil? Can I rightfully say that

my hunting is acceptable because it provides food to those in need? Can I fairly say that it's okay to kill a predator to prevent the killing of a cow or calf?

When I take a hard look at it all, I wish I were able to land definitively either on the hunting side or the animal rights side. But there are valid arguments from both sides. Hunting provides food for me and my family, and we give what we hunt to those who are in need. Hunting maintains healthy herd numbers, preventing die-offs from overgrazing. Hunting stimulates economies and teaches new generations about human-animal relationships, survival, and the need to care for nature.

Yet I can easily counter each of these arguments – food is readily available in stores and protein can be found in plants. The lack of predators to naturally cull herd sizes is because of hunting, therefore reintroduction of those predators should be of most importance. Economies benefit from wildlife viewing just as much as hunting, and our relationship with animals can be taught without killing.

I wish there were clear-cut answers to this issue, but there aren't. If I'm honest with my belief that all creatures are loved by God, then I'm in a difficult space. I hate to think that hunting is evil, because then I'm a perpetrator of evil. Yet I can't necessarily say that it's altogether not evil. What lies in my heart is that I take no pleasure in the moment – it's a very somber and personal moment between myself, the animal, and our Creator.

If I were to take respite in anything, it would be the fact that I am wrestling with these issues and trying to figure it out. I have hope that I can have conversations about hunting and about animals with those around me. And I hope that in all of it, I can know and share my love for my Creator.