

Of birds, butterflies, brown bears... and Christian mission!

I'm a conservation biologist, and sometimes I'm asked, "What does Christian faith have to do with conservation?" Actually, quite a lot! The Christian faith is not so much about my personal beliefs but about public truth, as revealed to us by Jesus, not just some preferred flavour of spirituality. Jesus regularly summed up his ministry by announcing that in his very self, God's kingdom was at hand!

What does God's kingdom look like? In Micah 6:8, we read the following: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Further, when Jesus read the scriptures in Nazareth, he announced, for the first time, who he was (and is): God's anointed one, the Messiah. He said, "Today this scripture [Isaiah 61] is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Just as he announced, he enacted throughout his life and ministry: proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind. In short, Jesus has come and made himself known to us, has sought us even while we were still estranged from Him, to redeem and restore all things! Indeed, it is God himself who has come, for Jesus is Emmanuel, "God with us." Far more than just a good teacher or a role model, Jesus is God's very presence with humanity: "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6) through whom alone we can know the Father, as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Why does this matter, and how does it relate to birds, butterflies, bears... and Christian mission?!? First of all, mission is not what we do, whether for God or others, but Jesus' mission *in which we participate*. We recognize this each time we pray "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). And the Christian mission—that is, Christ's mission—is comprehensive in nature: proclaiming the good news of Jesus and his Kingdom, teaching and nurturing believers, responding to human need through loving service, transforming unjust structures, and safeguarding creation (cf. Five Marks of Mission).

So when I, as a biologist, am involved in environmental conservation work—whether counting birds here in Ardgay (over 130 species!) or working with livestock herders and park rangers in the mountains of Central Asia to monitor and protect snow leopard and brown bear—in all this, I am living out my faith, participating in God's redemptive purposes for all creation. The same can be said of people in all walks of life, whether caring for others, tending the land, or other vocations. We are all called, each of us, to participate in God's mission in the world, to respond to His great love for us and join in the inauguration of His kingdom on earth that began 2,000 years ago. And more than anything that we ourselves might do, it is *Jesus himself* who is our salvation. How is it that Jesus can save us? He can save us because He is fully God and fully man. If Jesus were not truly and fully God, he could not save us. If he were not also fully human, he could not reach us where we are. But now we can live united with Him, responding to his love that came long before we knew him. This is the basis of Christian mission. Life with Christ often leads us in wonderful and unexpected ways, especially as we realise that God is truly *for us* and has in fact been pursuing us since before we were born.



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