

What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ in relation to the Environment- what the Bible calls 'His Creation'?

Reading from Colossians 1. 15-20

Over recent years theologians have realised that scripture is filled with references to the Environment which perhaps we have not noticed so well in the past.

Biblical foundations for care for the Environment:

1. Genesis 1: God created the world, including us. We have a powerful creator God.
2. Genesis 1: God loves the world and pronounced it '...very good' (not just average!).
3. Genesis 2.15: God wants us to love Creation too. Mankind was instructed by Him to 'till it and keep it' (other translations - 'take care of it'). Christians are called to serve and preserve Creation. Christian 'dominion' is therefore absolutely **not** 'domination'.
4. Human sin created a breach with God. We have treated creation very badly.
5. Good News: we have reconciliation and redemption through Jesus. But so has Creation.
 - John 3.16 : 'God so loved the **world**' The word for world here is GK. *Cosmos*. Jesus is good news for the cosmos, for everything, not just for humankind.
 - Col 1.20: Jesus reconciles '**all things**' to himself on the cross.
 - Mark 16.15: We are told to 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news **to the whole creation.**'

As Christians we have a powerful mandate and obligation to care for God's Creation because He made it and because He loves it.

6. Critical additional point:

Matthew 22.26-40, when Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, his reply is first to love God and then to love our neighbour.

Loving our neighbour is evidenced by how we treat the vulnerable, the marginalised, the poor, the migrants and the refugees among us. We now know that these groups are affected 'first and worst' by environmental damage (such as air pollution) and climate change.

Andy cited the example of air pollution in inner cities causing the deaths of between 28 000 and 36000 deaths annually in the UK (according to a report published in March 2019 by Public Health England). We know that it is generally poorer people who live in inner cities.

Therefore, we have a double mandate to care for all God's Creation because:

- God loves it and He made it
- People, whom God also loves, depend upon it.

Please continue overleaf...

How can we put this love into practice as individuals, or as Life Groups?

Enjoy

Nurture

Protect

We will automatically do all 3 of these for people whom we love. But these also apply to God's Creation - the Environment.

Some practical ideas:

1. Try actively to enjoy God's Creation every day by walking in it, for example. If you are not able to do this, use television programmes, or poetry to give you the same sense of wonder and enjoyment. Allow God's Nature to speak to, encourage you and to point you back towards our creator God.

Consider the following:

2. Energy supplier: Switching your household energy supplier to a firm that generates electricity from renewable resources.
3. Transport: Reduce your use of fossil-fuelled transport. Cycle or walk locally when you can. Use trains rather than planes if possible. If not, offset your carbon emissions with a reputable company (Andy mentioned Climate Stewards, a sister organisation to A Rocha UK (www.climatestewards.org)).
4. Investments: switch as much of these as you can to ethical funds which are not invested in companies which continue to explore for fossil-fuels or which damage nature through deforestation, and so on.
5. Your garden: try to create nature and wildlife friendly areas with lots of pollinator-friendly plants.
6. Your diet: can you eat less meat and dairy produce- perhaps becoming what Andy called a 'flexitarian' – someone who eats meat only at weekends or on alternate days alongside vegetarian options?
7. Your voice: can you sign the petition or write to your MP about local environmental issues?
8. Sign up to the Wild Christian e-bulletin produced by A Rocha for further ideas.

Andy's tips:

- Many of these considerations are made easier if we approach them with others, eg our Life Groups.
- Start with things you can do easily and leave the harder things till later.
- Celebrate what you achieve and don't be put off by what you fail at.

What can we do as a church?

- 2. and 3. above are applicable (including the provision of cycle racks at church).
- Car-sharing scheme.
- If embarking upon a major piece of expenditure (eg a new church boiler), plan to make it as environmentally- friendly as possible.
- Put pressure on the UK government to keep to its pledges with regard to the Environment in preparation for COP26, the UN climate conference to be held in the UK in Nov 2021.
- Hold a Climate Sunday- sign up for this via the A Rocha website.