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# Sermon Outlines

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think



Reflecting on the moment when they scooped their first award from the former Eco-Congregation scheme, Anne Stone of St Mary's, East Grinstead, shared an entertaining story about a sermon (A Rocha UK's *Root & Branch* magazine spring/summer 2015).

'We undertook many projects,' Anne recalled, 'but the one we felt reached the most people was our Harvest Celebration in October. This was a family service with the uniformed organisations. The church was full and all age groups were represented.'

The importance of caring for God's earth was emphasised throughout the service – including the hymns and prayers of intercession. Children from the Kidz Club gave a presentation of 'the three Rs' – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

St Mary's vicar Rev Paul Seaman talked about the importance of water and sanitation, and the adverse impact of human activities on other species. Having used various images to illustrate his address, the vicar was told by one small child that he had used too much paper in his talk.

'This made the congregation laugh,' said Anne, 'but also showed that the message had got across to at least one child!'

do



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## Use this short talk on the environment, by A Rocha UK founder Dave Bookless

These sermon notes are taken from A Rocha International's *Whose World Is It Anyway?* resources.

Caring for the earth is part of our worship. If the primary purpose of human existence is to worship God and enjoy him forever, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, then we need to remember caring for God's precious planet – that he cares for too, that he made for Christ – is part of worshipping Jesus.

We are called to worship God both in our attitudes and our actions regarding creation. The first command given in Genesis 1 – our mandate for human existence – is about ruling over earth and its creatures on God's behalf. This is what it means to be the image of God. Yet we have constantly failed to be good stewards. However, through Jesus, the true Lord of creation, we have the chance to make a new start.

In Romans 8, Saint Paul uses the image of creation as like a pregnant woman, groaning in longing to be set free from its bondage to decay. Yet in the same passage, we read that creation is waiting for something else. It is waiting for 'the sons and daughters of God to be revealed'.

What does this mean? It is a reference back to Genesis 1 – our first mandate to care for creation. Through the example and the saving work of Jesus, that now becomes possible, and creation is waiting for God's children – those who follow Jesus – to take up their call again. Creation is waiting for us to worship God by caring for this fragile and wonderful world.

Of course, we have a wonderful example of creation care as worship in the story of Noah – a man who responded to God's call in rescuing all kinds of animals and birds from destruction. Today, we need to look again at the radical message of Noah. It is a reminder that God cares not only for people, but also for all that he has made, and his call to us is to worship and obey him in caring too. Wildlife conservation done to the glory of God is Christian mission.

Finally, let's remind ourselves of some words from the most familiar Christian prayer of all – when Jesus asks us to pray that God's will 'be done on earth as it is in heaven'. This is a call to prayer, and a call to worshipful action. It is a call to envisage the earthing of heaven – God's kingdom rule beginning to take place here, not just in our churches, not just in our human societies, but on earth – throughout the creation.



## Teach on the stewardship of creation

Here are some sermon notes based on Matthew 25, Amos 5 and on being prepared – a challenge to use our power for good by choosing to live hopefully. We are stewards of God's creation, called to live in right relationship with the earth and all its people.

## Explore the history of creation care in Christian thought

Stewardship has been a major theme of Christian relationship to nature throughout church history. The Fathers of the Church, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch and Tatian developed a theology of creation. Celtic spirituality was much aware of the presence of the divine in the world of nature. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) and Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1178) saw in the world the presence of God. Some theological background to creation care in Christian communities is offered in this useful document.

## Explore the question, 'Whose world is it anyway?'

Part of the Hope For Planet Earth pack is a sermon that looks at this very issue, using practical examples and examining what the Bible has to say.

## Preach about environmental justice

Ten sermon themes on a range of biblical texts are offered on the website below. God speaking through nature, praising God with creation, learning from how God deals with creation and our attitude towards God's creatures are just some of the questions offered in these helpful teaching notes.



### CLIMATE CAMPAIGN SERMON NOTES

[www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/Climate-campaign-sermon-notes-June-2014.pdf](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/Climate-campaign-sermon-notes-June-2014.pdf)

### ENVIRONMENTAL THEOLOGY COURSE

[www.cebts.eu/programme/doc/environmental-theology-course-2007.pdf](http://www.cebts.eu/programme/doc/environmental-theology-course-2007.pdf)

### WHOSE WORLD IS IT ANYWAY SERMON

[atyourservice.arocha.org/en/whose-world-is-it-anyway-sermon](http://atyourservice.arocha.org/en/whose-world-is-it-anyway-sermon)

### TEN SERMON THEMES

[www.neccsa.org.za/Documents-De%20Gruchy.htm](http://www.neccsa.org.za/Documents-De%20Gruchy.htm)



## Reflect on the theme of biodiversity

This is the variety of life on earth, essential for sustaining the natural living systems or 'ecosystems' that provide us with food, fuel, health, wealth and other vital services. A teaching programme could reflect on humanity's achievements to safeguard biodiversity and focus on the challenges ahead. A Rocha International's What A Wildly Wonderful World series offers a sermon on Noah and biodiversity. This sermon is adapted from one written for Creation Time 2009 and has appeared on the website of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland.

## Study existing church papers on the environment

Pope Francis's recent encyclical on the environment offers many important points that can be easily incorporated into sermons. Thoughts and reflections can be gleaned from Orthodox Church leaders and scientists who met for the Halki Summit II on the theme 'Theology, Ecology, and the Word: a conversation on the environment, literature and the arts'. Shrinking the Footprint is the Church of England's national environmental campaign. 'The present challenges of environment and economy, of human development and global poverty, can only be faced with extraordinary Christ-liberated courage,' said Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

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### BIODIVERSITY SERMON THEME

[atyourservice.arocha.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/WWW-Sermon-Noah-Biodiversity.pdf](http://atyourservice.arocha.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/WWW-Sermon-Noah-Biodiversity.pdf)

### ENCICLICA LAUDATO SI

[w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

### SHRINKING THE FOOTPRINT

[www.churchofengland.org/about-us/our-buildings/shrinking-the-footprint.aspx](http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/our-buildings/shrinking-the-footprint.aspx)

### HALIKI SUMMIT

[www.halkisummit.com](http://www.halkisummit.com)