

PREACHING



Worship and Teaching

ECO  **CHURCH**
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Why

The Christian theology of creation is an essential part of the Christian faith. Christians believe in a God who created something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), and that creation was made freely, as a gift. These two fundamental theological principles are important to Christian theology: God is Creator and God gives freely. God is not just the God of humans, but the Creator of the whole cosmos. As we awaken more and more to our collective blindness as regards the sanctity of creation, we become attuned to the sinful relationship we have entered into with all that God has created and blessed. At the same time, our eyes are opened to a theology, scripture and a spirituality that has been eclipsed. It is from the pulpit and in learning groups that our congregations can become more enlightened about the Christian faith, which has never just been about human beings. It is there that they are led, taught, encouraged, inspired and enabled to live out all aspects of their Christian discipleship. Who knows what visions might be grasped through preaching the full implications of the gospel in this way?

How?

There is ample scriptural material to help frame a preaching/teaching series on creation:

Genesis 1 and 2

- Creation is God's; it is good and blessed by God (Genesis 1:13).
- We are to be God's image-bearers in how we treat creation (Genesis 1:26).
- God gave humans the responsibility of using (not exploiting) the earth's resources and looking after them (Genesis 2:15).
- Sabbath is an integral principle, practised by God, made explicit in the act of creating itself: God rests, creation rests, humans are commanded to rest (Genesis 2:1-3). The principle of rest can be seen to challenge our cultural assumptions about productivity, profit, the cycle of the year, our relationship to creation and much more (See also Exodus 20:8-11; 23:10-12).



Worship and Teaching

Preaching

Covenant

God's covenant is with all living things (Genesis 17:7-8), and the whole cosmos is waiting for its restoration (Romans 8:19, 22-24). The law is given to God's chosen people and it details limits concerning what they can take from the land (see Leviticus 19:9-10 as well as the command to tithe in Leviticus 23:9-13). Whilst Christians no longer live under the law, Jesus' summary of it still applies and those principles of not taking more than we need, giving the first-fruits to God, leaving food for the poor and allowing creation to rest, still carry important teaching for Christians to apply to our lives today. From the first universal covenant, to the final covenant in Jesus' blood, Christians believe that it is God who defines right and wrong. The Bible clearly tells us that humans are unable to do the right things on their own; we require the grace that comes with Jesus. This is true too in relation to our attitude towards God's creation.

Jesus' teaching

The feeding of the 5,000, the parable of the sower, Jesus stilling the storm, Jesus' baptism and temptation, Jesus as the true vine... have you noticed how Jesus' ministry so often occurs in the open air, and that he uses nature metaphors frequently in his teaching?

Similarly, his resurrection appearances – on the road to Emmaus, in the garden (where he is thought to be the gardener), on the beach – reveal a person who is at home outside, in nature, in his Father's creation. This is because Jesus is part of that creation, whilst also Lord of it ('even the winds and the waves obey him', Matthew 8:27). Jesus' connection with all that has been made should guide us as Christians to develop lives and practices that reflect a deeper relatedness with, and compassion for, all creation.

Creation in the book of Psalms

Psalms 8: God as creator

Psalms 24:1 All of creation belongs to God

Psalms 65: Thanksgiving for earth's bounty

Psalms 148: All living things praise God



Worship and Teaching

Preaching

Creation and new creation

Like the opening chapters of Genesis, Colossians 1:15–20 can be said to be foundational for a Christian theology of creation. The world was made not for humans, but for Christ (v 16), and the scope of salvation achieved by his reconciling death extends to encompass 'all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (v 20). A perfectly restored and renewed creation will be revealed when Christ returns (see also Revelation 21:1–5), until which time, Christians are charged with anticipating that 'bringing heaven to earth' and showing what life in the kingdom of God looks like in all aspects of life, including caring for creation.

Longer reads and other resources

Listen to Dave Bookless of A Rocha International, preaching in January 2021 about climate change in the context of Covid-19 and the upcoming COP26 climate summit in Glasgow:

atyourservice.arocha.org/en/caring-for-gods-wounded-world/

Martin and Margot Hodson are active A Rocha UK supporters and have useful background information here: hodsons.org/

Margot is ordained and works as Director of Theology and Education for the John Ray Initiative, an educational charity seeking to link faith and the environment: jri.org.uk/

Preaching for God's World: preachingforgodsworld.org/ seek to help clergy, lay preachers and all Christians to explore the set lectionary readings for each week from the perspective of creation care and ecological justice. By providing weekly reflections from activists, theologians and church leaders across the world church they resource and encourage Christians to grow in our care for God's creation preachingforgodsworld.org/sermon-suggestions/

Sustainable Preaching: sustainable-preaching.org/ was established to link Christianity, the Bible and sustainability. They provide an archive of weekly ecumenical and global sermon notes: sustainable-preaching.org/sermon-suggestions/



Worship and Teaching

Preaching

Books

Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. (2010). Darton, Longman and Todd.

Bookless, Dave. *Planetwise: Dare to care for God's World*. (2008). IVP. A Rocha UK's founder shares the compelling biblical case for caring for the planet God made for his glory and his people's enjoyment.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Land*. (2002). Fortress Press.

Deane-Drummond, Celia. *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth*. (2017). Cascade Companions.

Gottlieb, Roger S. *A Greener Faith*. (2011). Oxford University Press.

Hodson, Martin and Hodson, Margot. *Green Reflections: Biblical inspiration for sustainable living*. (2021). Bible Reading Fellowship.

Oliver, Simon. *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed*. (2017), Bloomsbury.

Tarrant, Ian. *How to Celebrate Creation*. (2019). Grove Books.

'Laudato Si', Pope Francis' Encyclical, 2015 is available as a download from:
cafod.org.uk/pray/laudato-si-encyclical



Worship and Teaching

Preaching

Case studies

Rt Revd Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford, spoke on Climate Sunday 2020 here: [youtube.com/watch?v=7nKIHLIOS50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nKIHLIOS50).

Using four different biblical passages, he asks us to consider how we live in the face of the huge challenge of climate change and finishes with some very practical tips!