

[Slide 1 – title screen]

Why Christians should care for creation
Jo Swinney

It is an honour to be with you today, even if we can only see one another on screens. And I am so glad you have asked me to speak about why Christians should care for creation. This is something I have cared about very deeply for a long time.

The story of creation care and me begins with my birth to a father who loved to watch birds. A love of bird watching, incidentally, is not genetic. I have never been able to muster much enthusiasm even for looking at the biggest, most brightly coloured ones.

He went birding when he was an English teacher, and when he worked for a church. And then on a birding trip to Sweden in the early 1980s he found a way to spend a lot more time birding.

[Slide 2 – family pic]

When I was five years old, my parents, two siblings and I moved from the UK to Southern Portugal and the world's quirkiest mission enterprise to date began: A Rocha - Christians in Conservation. Few understood. Many disagreed. And my work trying to explain biblical mandate to care for creation began. It would have been easier to have a lawyer and a nurse for parents!

What I understood as a child was limited but some things I knew in my bones. I knew I loved my home in the Algarve, Quinta da Rocha, a headland covered in scrub, neglected almond, fig and olive orchards, vineyards and pines. As children we had the kind of freedom to roam my kids could barely imagine. This entire landscape was our playground – the kind of playground described in Psalm 65: 11,12

“You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.”

[Slide 3 – Quinta da Rocha]

While I was growing up, various large-scale threats registered somewhat – we made anti-CFC posters at school (remember CFCs?) and I had vague worries about the hole in the ozone layer. But I was acutely aware of a more local threat. Tourist infrastructure was covering the Algarve like a rampant skin disease and our headland's unblemished beauty was a constant temptation to greedy developers. I cared deeply about what happened to my home. When illegal wire fences appeared around the field below our house I cried. When it seemed as though the fragile legal protections would be breached, I lost sleep.

Our family left Portugal when I was 17. It was a long time before I connected again with specific place or cared much what happened to its flora and fauna. But I had committed my

life to God and I was a regular reader of the Bible. And on almost every page of the Bible is the clear message – this world and how we treat it has everything to do with being a follower of Jesus.

Although there are many more, I am going to give you my top three biblical reasons why Christians should care for creation.

[Slide 4 – outline slide a]

As a child, I loved Quinta da Rocha, the headland, with all my heart. I wouldn't have needed convincing to do anything in my extremely limited power to protect it. Imagine then how God, maker of the heavens and the Earth, looks at how his precious creation is being treated.

My first reasons why Christians should care for creation is this: God made it and he cares for it.

[Slide 5 – houses]

As Christians we say we love God and throughout the Bible God's concern, commitment, enjoyment and pride in creation shines through. One of the ways our love of God is expressed is in valuing what he values. Imagine there is a house that has passed through the generations in your family. This is a place full of happy and significant memories, and each owner has been careful to hand it on in good condition so it can continue to be the treasured home it has been to so many. Would you let it degrade and rot while it was yours? Would you feel okay about your children inheriting a rat infested, crumbling, damp, overgrown shack?

[slide 6 – outline slide b]

My second reason why Christians should care for creation is justice.

It is by and large the poor and powerless of this world who suffer the effects of deforestation, pollution, desertification, climate change, or the unsustainable extraction of raw materials. The Bible shows God to be passionate about justice, and God's people are encouraged to challenge oppression.

We are gathered here in this digital space from many countries around the world. We are sisters in Christ – part of the same family. Some of us, myself included, have been fortunate enough to have been shielded from the consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss. When a local harvest fails, we have access to food from elsewhere. In extreme heat we have air conditioning, fans or ice cold drinks. If pollution damages our lungs, there is treatment available. And we have sisters here for whom none of those luxuries are available. It is not fair. It is not right. This is an issue of justice.

[Slide 7 – outline slide c]

My third reason is hope.

A Rocha has been working in nature conservation around the world for almost forty years. In that time, earth has lost half its wild animals, we've put a dangerous amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and we've managed to get plastic waste into every nook and cranny of our planet. There is a new threat to mental health – 'eco anxiety.' Whether you work in the environmental field or just read the news, the impact of what is now a full-blown crisis takes its toll.

And yet those of us who work for A Rocha remain stubbornly hopeful. Day after day, in the 22 countries where we work, we plant indigenous saplings, monitor moth populations, clean up beaches, campaign for policies that are good for both people and planet, go into schools to teach environmental education – small acts of defiant hope in our long term future.

[Slide 8 -Mum holding blackboard]

This is my mother, one of the most hopeful people I have ever known. The sign she is holding reads: We can look all the bad news in the eye, but keep writing our stories in the landscape and say with confidence, "It isn't over yet! God still has plans for the world he loves."

All Christians can remain hopeful. Because we hope in a God who declared his creation 'good' and who loved the world – cosmos in the original Greek – so much he sent his son for its redemption.

Dave Bookless, A Rocha's Director of Theology & Churches, writes this, and these are the words I will end with.

[Slide 9 – Quote]

Jesus is described not just as the Saviour of fallen humanity, but as the one for whom all creation was made – and as the one through whom all creation will one day 'be liberated from its bondage to decay' (Colossians 1: 15-17; Romans 8:19-23). We do not know how all this will be accomplished, but we are given motivation and hope. The Almighty God who created and sustains his world wants all people to be actively involved in this great plan to redeem the whole of creation.

May God bless you and keep you and make his face to shine upon you.
Amen.