

JESUS THE ENVIRONMENTALIST

Group Calls Followers of Jesus to Care for His Creation

by Ephie Risho

Is gardening a way to serve Jesus? Members of A Rocha, a non-profit organization in Canada, argue the answer is a resounding yes. The earth, they declare, is God's creation, and one of our first mandates as His people is to care for it.

Matter matters.

In order to educate and empower followers of Jesus in the mission to care for creation, A Rocha is launching a substantial project culminating April 22 called Good Seed Sunday. The project asks a key question: if you're a follower of Jesus, what role will you play in caring for his creation?

The Scriptural framework guiding these efforts draws on influential passages such as Hosea 4:1-3. Verse 1 describes how the people were disconnected from God, then verse 2 goes on saying they were disconnected from and mistreating one another. In verse 3 we can read the result of this kind of action: "Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying."

These words, written over 2,700 years ago, sound a lot like our situation today. We live in a generation where corporations and individuals are enjoying significant economic gain at the expense of other people and the environment.

But there is hope, as seen in the New Testament passage Colossians 1:15-20. To understand Jesus' role in creation, the first verses spell it out clearly: Jesus is the "firstborn of all creation," and "all things have been created through him and for him." Then, the passage looks to how Jesus redeems our broken situation: "Through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven."

According to passages like these, God's mission includes all of creation in the redemptive work. This means that for those who want to follow Jesus, caring for the environment is one aspect of that calling. Yes, Jesus was an environmentalist.

Not all who profess to follow Jesus agree with this understanding of Scripture. Those who are opposed argue that, since God will build a new creation at some point, what's the point of taking care of the one we've got? The Good Seed Sunday project endeavours to educate those with this perspective to look at the many references to God caring for creation and calling us to be good stewards of it as well. This was the first mission God gave Adam in the garden (Gen 2:15) and continues to be relevant today.

The Good Seed Sunday project involves a number of components, including resources, training seminars, speaking engagements, and practical action projects. Church resource packages are intended to provide a theological grounding for God's mission to care for creation and what our involvement should look like. This includes sermons, worship resources, Bible study and small group materials, a Sunday school teacher kit, daily devotionals, and more.

The project also promotes practical action projects, ways to care for creation and connect people to their local communities. For example, building a community garden is a practical and significant way to mobilize people positively – they build a sense of community, teach valuable skills and lessons in the environment, and provide healthy and nourishing food that can be shared with those in need.

The A Rocha community gardens movement has seen a lot of great momentum and positive impact on local communities. Take, for example, A Rocha's newly established Winnipeg-based Just Growing program, which last season shared 350kg of organic produce with people in need, and provided food for over 1,000 people. Or look at Peace Portal Alliance Church in Surrey, BC, which started three garden beds last year and already is seeing wonderful results, including donations to the local food bank.

A Rocha's Community Garden Network is an online resource that provides workshops, training, and resources for church and neighbourhood groups desiring to start their own community gardens.

A Rocha does far more than start local gardens. Their efforts over the last decade have seen the growth of two study centres, numerous adults and children educated, the growth of a number of conservation projects across Canada, and dozens of community gardens.

Through years of educating and practical conservation projects, the people at A Rocha have received countless requests for more biblical training and practical help in living out the calling to care for creation. The Good Seed Sunday project is the culmination of many years of resources, intended to bring this aspect of the Christian walk to life in local churches across Canada.

In times such as these, where the environment is disregarded more than ever, it is especially important for those who follow Jesus to stand up for justice and what is right. According to James 4:17, knowing what is right and not doing anything about it is a sin, just like committing the act itself. A Rocha intends to

educate and give proper knowledge to Jesus' followers so that, with knowledge, they can play their role in redeeming God's creation.

A Rocha Canada, started in 1999, is an international conservation organization working to show God's love for all creation. The work comes out of a commitment to environmental action through community-based projects. A Rocha means "the Rock" where the first project began. A Rocha is now working in 20 countries around the world.

If you'd like more information about Good Seed Sunday, please call A Rocha Canada at 604-542-9006, or email goodseed@arocha.ca. You can visit the website at www.arocha.ca/goodseedsunday.



About the Author: Ephie Risho is a writer and father, based out of a small town in the Rocky Mountains. He has an MDiv from Regent College, and currently runs a creative company doing web, graphics and writing.