

## High School Environmental Day Assembly, 16 August 2018

### Presented by Julia Jardine, A Rocha Australia Director

When you were younger, did you ever 'joined the dots' to reveal a picture? Initially there is a confusing, meaningless, random collection of dots and only as the dots are joined together one-by-one is a clear image or picture revealed that could be understood and appreciated. Beforehand there was no meaning, but as the right dots are joined in the right way you can make sense of what you're seeing.

I'd like to tell you three short stories of people whose lives were transformed when they were helped to join the dots of their lives into a clear picture of who they are and what this means for their lives and how they live.

Two stories come from A Rocha Canada and can be listened to again in the short film on their website. The third story is my own.

Firstly let me introduce you to John – he is a man in his 50's, very successful in business, a big house, big car, a wife, kids and they recycled at home. He thought they were 'doing their bit' and didn't really think much about the environment and gave no thought to the bigger global picture.

And when he did think about the environment and its problems, he just got angry. I expect he felt helpless and probably raged at governments and business – why wasn't anyone doing more. It all seemed like a hopeless situation, and what was being done was too little, too late...

Then John met a Christian from A Rocha Canada who talked about the same issues in a completely different way. What impacted John most was the hopefulness with which he talked:

- Hopeful because he believed in a loving God who hadn't just created the world but continually sustains it, because he cares for it and loves it; and
- a hopefulness that comes from the promise in the Bible that one day the entire world will be redeemed and as the Bible puts it "set free from its bondage to decay".
- There will be a new heaven and a new earth and because of this hope our environmental work is not in vain, we are working towards a restoration that has been promised and for which we have been given evidence when Jesus rose.

For John, this helped him join the dots, to see the bigger picture, and make sense of his place in the environment.

He joined the dots and his life was transformed. He sold his SUV and bought a hybrid car, the environment became personal to him and part of his faith journey. In his own words, these were "*all natural actions as a result of a relationship with God*"

The second story, is about a young man called Bryan, who is around 13–14yrs old. How many of you here today are 13–14? Okay – he was the same age as you.

For him his experience of the environment was what he had seen on TV or read about. You know the David Attenborough Blue Planet type programmes.

And it was relatively dull and a bit boring... until he had opportunity to get out in nature and experience it for himself.

And what he found, far from being dull and boring, was a world of wonder and a freedom never before experienced. It was life-giving and filled his wellness tank.

Have you heard of your wellness tank – imagine we all have a tank, and we pour into things that give us a sense of well being and satisfaction. And at the bottom is a drain, representing the activities and situations and that drain our sense of well-being. There will always be things that drain us – so we need to ensure we are always topping up our tank.

Being in nature, for Bryan filled his wellness tank, joined the dots and transformed his life. Today we have the opportunity to get out into nature into the splendourous forests – to get the dirt under our nails, to hear the birds singing, feel the wind on our cheeks, to be awed by the awesomeness of creation ...make the most of it and see what it does to you wellness tank.

I'm not sure which of these two stories you might relate to most – or perhaps there are elements from both that strike a cord with you?

Do the global environmental problems make you feel angry and helpless in the face of the challenge like John?

Have you not yet, like Bryan, experienced the wonder of creation and the well-being felt when taking care of God's world and enjoying it as God intended.

Or perhaps you might relate to my own experience?

My own story is that I have always loved birds and bird watching, I loved wetlands, forests, being outdoors. I was also a church kid and daughter of a vicar, and loving others was an expression of our love for God, it was in our DNA, it was our identity as children of God.

There was very little connection however between my love for the outdoors and my faith. I suppose I considered bird watching and nature as a 'hobby' and something that competed for time with my faith.

It was only when I came to see that the environment is inextricably linked to issues of social justice, poverty and inequality, did I understand that creation care and environmental action is also all about loving your neighbour.

For who is most affected by environmental disasters and sea- level rise?

– Those living in marginal environments, where the ability to sustain life is already touch and go; those who can't afford to live in safer places, those already in poverty.

Who is most affected by deforestation, desertification, the lack of clean water – the poor and marginalized, and often women and girls more than men.

Who is most affected by pollution? – Those who have no choice where they live.

So joining the dots for me was understanding creation care in its widest sense as part of my **identity** as a child of God, as an expression of my love my God and my neighbour.

And as children of God:

We share a family likeness with God, and so will love the things that he loves – From the Bible we see that God loves all people, made in his image, and he also loves the whole of creation, which he sustains and delights in.

And as children of God we delight him when we're obedient. The Greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind and soul and the second is to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Because environmental change, such as that caused by global warming, and environmental damage, such as pollution or deforestation disproportionately affect the poor – those who are least able to help themselves – loving our neighbour means doing all we can to minimize that damage and changes. We care for our neighbours when we care for the environment.

And our identity, who we are deep down, directs our lifestyle. If we consider ourselves to be Children of God, to have the family likeness of God, and to be part of his Kingdom on earth, what does it mean to be living a 'kingdom lifestyle'? An important part of all our journeys is figuring out what this looks like day by day.

The exciting thing for me, seeing creation care as part of my identity as a child of God is that I can make lifestyle choices today that are consistent with my identity and family-likeness.

We don't need to have a science degree, to join an environmental movement, to try to solve the world problems, but we can all start:

- switching lights off,
- switching equipment off rather than leaving on stand by
- turning the tap off as we brush our teeth,
- taking the bus rather than driving,
- not placing each piece of fruit we buy in the supermarket in a separate plastic bag,
- putting out bird feed or putting up bird boxes,
- weeding out invasive species that threaten indigenous or native habitats
- growing some of our own food so we reduce the carbon mileage of what we eat.

So, this final thought for you to take home –

As followers of Jesus, caring for the environment is 'who we are' as children of God – it's our identity and a lifestyle choice.

And just, for one moment, imagine what could be accomplished if all followers of Jesus joined the dots and saw God's big picture of his world wide family caring for one another through caring passionately for his creation.

You can be the difference, so don't leave it to others.