

**Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**September 15, 2019**  
**Gospel of Luke 15:1-32**

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Consider focusing your Sunday Gospel on the story of the Prodigal Son from the perspective of our common home. Here are a few points for you to consider:

- In the story, the younger son demands that his father give him his inheritance right away. Then he squanders it. In ancient times, for a son to demand his inheritance from his father, while the father was still alive, showed a complete lack of respect. It was the ultimate insult, a slap in the face of one's father.
  - From an evolutionary, deep-time perspective, our human species is like the youngest son of our Creator God. When we consider our place among the other members of the Earth's community of life, our species, Homo Sapiens, have only been around about 200,000 years! Our Earth is 4.6 billion years old. The universe is about 13.8 billion years old. Scientists have calculated that there are [over a hundred billion galaxies](#) in the observable universe. Our own Milky Way is just one of those galaxies, yet [it alone has hundreds of billions of stars](#).
  - In that fine-tuned universe, there is -- as far as we can tell -- only one precious planet like ours teeming with an amazing diversity of life. It is part of the rich evolutionary inheritance of the Earth. [It doesn't belong to us but to God](#).
  - And yet, driven by its insatiable desires and hyper-consumption, contemporary humanity, like the impetuous younger son, dares to claim a right to that evolutionary inheritance and we may be squandering it.
- The effects of this behavior are clear to see. For industrialized nations like ours, we have made some progress in cleaning up our air, water and land. For less developed nations, far less environmental progress has been realized. But in total, there is still much to be done to keep our planet from looking "more and more like an immense pile of filth," as Pope Francis said in Laudato Si'.
- Earlier this year, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services – an independent international body comprising more than 130 member Governments – published a [landmark, 1,500-page study of the effects of our global economy on the natural world](#). The report was compiled by more than 400 experts in 50 countries.
  - The report found that more than 1 million species of plants and animals are threatened with extinction, many within decades – more than ever in human history. Thousands of species have already been wiped out. This loss is a direct result of human activity.
    - The rate of species extinction now is tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the last 10 million years. Without significant changes in human behavior, the rate of species extinction will continue to accelerate.
- Like the younger son in the Gospel story, sometimes humankind has shown a great disregard for the gift of God's creation. Like the younger son, we seem more interested in satisfying our immediate needs than looking out for the greater good, the common good of all.

- In the Gospel, though, the younger son eventually realizes his foolishness and comes to his senses. A growing number of people in the faith communities and society at large are also coming to their senses.
  - [Scientific societies](#) and governments are speaking more clearly than ever before about the overwhelming [scientific evidence for the human cause](#) and [severe impacts](#) of climate change.
  - [Churches, synagogues and mosques are going deeper into their respective faith tradition](#), retrieving their teachings and wisdom on care for creation and applying it to the issues such as climate change or threats to biodiversity.
  - Young people, in particular, are leading efforts to draw attention to the peril our actions have on our common home. Should not our Churches be encouraging them?
- In the Gospel parable, the younger son experiences genuine remorse. He comes to terms with what he has done wrong. He learns humility. And he dares to return to his father, asking not for a privileged status but to be a servant. The story describes a pattern and a path for our own ecological conversion.
- How would you imagine the deep conversion and homecoming of our human civilization? That homecoming is not just about us. It's about God's longing for us to return. It's about the Creator's love for us; God's amazing forgiveness and generosity. Can we help others tap into it as a motivating force for the needed ecological conversion and healing of the earth?
- Let's all pause for a minute of silent reflection on what our personal response ought to be to God's call for us to turn back to him, to leave behind the dead-ends of our current way of consuming, and to care for our common home and our brothers and sisters throughout it.

### **Suggested Hymns**

[Tend the Ground](#)\* (from the album [Our Common Home](#))

[Litany for the Earth](#)\* (from the album [Our Common Home](#))

Sacred Creation (from the album [Our Common Home](#))

Every Creature is Sister and Brother (from the album [Our Common Home](#))

All Creatures of Our God and King

For the Beauty of the Earth

How Great Thou Art

*\* Video available at link*

### **Prayers of the Faithful** (to choose from)

That we as Christians may respond to the Holy Spirit calling us to safeguard God's creation and stand in solidarity with all human and non-human inhabitants of the earth. We pray to the Lord.

That, inspired by the example of St. Francis of Assisi – the Patron Saint of ecology – each of us may become instruments of God's healing for our imperiled planet and its inhabitants. We pray to the Lord.

For our children and grandchildren, whose future is threatened by the destruction of the Earth's ecosystems, that we may pass to the future generations the gift of an Earth with cleaner land, water, and air; healed, restored, and teeming with life. We pray to the Lord.

For the faith-based groups and grassroots movements for social change that are championing both equity and climate justice. We pray to the Lord.

That the human family may gain wisdom and courage to treat the non-human inhabitants of the earth with due respect, reverence, and moral consideration. We pray to the Lord.

**Gracious God**, bless us as we celebrate your creation and worship you as Creator of the Universe. Help our humanity to mend our ways, to stop squandering our rich, ecological inheritance, and come back to you. We ask this in your Holy Name. Amen.