

Editorial

Sheila Klassen-Wiebe

One Sunday I wanted to bake cookies, and my mother gently reprimanded me: Sunday is a day for rest, not work. Even when the grain was ripe and rain was forecast, my father never worked in the fields on Sunday. Keeping the Sabbath holy was serious business for my family and my church. Since those early years, my thinking about Sabbath has changed, but the importance of remembering the Sabbath has continued.

The commandment to “remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy” appears in two forms in the Old Testament. In Exodus 20:8–11, Israel is commanded to keep the Sabbath because God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. In Deuteronomy 5:12–15, God’s people are to keep the Sabbath by remembering that God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and by granting rest to their households. In both versions, the Sabbath is a gift from God. Keeping the Sabbath reminds us that God is in charge of the world and we are not, that God’s creating and redeeming activity exists prior to all our activities. To keep the Sabbath holy means to set apart a time and space to remember and to rest. The liberating intention of the Sabbath is reflected also in the laws about the Sabbath year (Lev. 25:1–7) and the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:8–55), with their social-economic implications for the entire community.

How we should honor these commandments has been debated over the centuries. Jesus himself contributed to the debate by interpreting the Sabbath in ways that were sometimes out of step with his contemporaries’ convictions. *That* the Sabbath was important, however, was never in question.

This issue of *Vision* invites readers to consider Sabbath from a rich variety of perspectives and to contemplate the ongoing significance of Sabbath. We begin with a sermon by April Yamasaki, which introduces many of the themes and texts in this

issue—all from the perspective of Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath. The next two articles in this issue consider the implications of Sabbath for whole communities and for all creation. Spencer Bradford examines Sabbath principles of social equity and economic justice on the basis of biblical accounts of “enough for all,” while Katerina Friesen considers the Christian hope for eschatological Sabbath rest in light of a creation groaning under human exploitation. From here we turn to the challenges of practicing Sabbath in a frenetically busy world: Marlene Kropf offers two essential pillars undergirding the Sabbath experience, and Carrie Martens suggests focal practices for families with children. Rabbi Karen Soria describes rituals and biblical principles of Sabbath observance from her Jewish tradition’s rich heritage. Two pastors, Rudy Dirks and Paul Mo, offer perspectives on the gifts and challenges of honoring the Sabbath by sharing about their personal journeys. In the next two essays, we move back to the implications of Sabbath for creation and for just relationships: Randy S. Woodley reflects on how indigenous theological perspectives on creation and shalom living can inform our Sabbath keeping, and Aiden Enns describes one community’s creative witness to taking a sabbath from oppressive habits of consumption. Derek Suderman offers yet another angle on Sabbath; he suggests that both Jesus and the Pharisees were concerned about being faithful to Scripture, and that from these Sabbath controversies we can learn something about ethical discernment. Finally, Ron Guengerich reviews Walter Brueggemann’s influential recent work on Sabbath and highlights resources for those who want to read more on the topic.

The articles in this issue offer a rich diversity of reflections on the topic of Sabbath. And yet, throughout the issue certain words and ideas bubble up repeatedly: *gift*, *delight*, *shalom*, and *trust in a God who provides*. These words point to the invitational, life-giving intention of Sabbath. May this issue stir us to such an honoring of the Sabbath, even as we wait with longing for the “Sabbath rest that still remains.”

About the editor

Sheila Klassen-Wiebe is associate professor of New Testament at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is currently working on a commentary on James for the Believers Church Bible Commentary series.