

The Christian Practice of Everyday Life

David S. Cunningham
and William T. Cavanaugh, series editors

This series seeks to present specifically Christian perspectives on some of the most prevalent contemporary practices of everyday life. It is intended for a broad audience—including clergy, interested laypeople, and students. The books in this series are motivated by the conviction that, in the contemporary context, Christians must actively demonstrate that their allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ always takes priority over secular structures that compete for our loyalty—including the state, the market, race, class, gender, and other functional idolatries. The books in this series will examine these competing allegiances as they play themselves out in particular day-to-day practices, and will provide concrete descriptions of how the Christian faith might play a more formative role in our everyday lives.

The Christian Practice of Everyday Life series is an initiative of The Ekklesia Project, an ecumenical gathering of pastors, theologians, and lay leaders committed to helping the church recall its status as the distinctive, real-world community dedicated to the priorities and practices of Jesus Christ and to the inbreaking Kingdom of God. (For more information on The Ekklesia Project, see <www.ekklesiaproject.org>.)

Living the Sabbath

Discovering the Rhythms
of Rest and Delight

THE CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE Series

Norman Wirzba



BrazosPress
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Meaning of the Sabbath

■ From a scriptural point of view, Sabbath observance is a matter of life and death. Having again gathered the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, Moses put Sabbath observance at the top of the list of things God has commanded them to do: “Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy Sabbath of solemn rest for the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death” (Exod. 35:2). This command reiterates a similar one given in Exodus 31:12–17, where we are told that Sabbath observance reflects a covenant between the nation and God, a covenant testifying to God’s creative and refreshing power. Anyone who violates this covenant is cut off from the people and should die. Indeed, Sabbath observance is one of the key practices that will set Israel apart from all other nations. Insofar as Israel fails in its Sabbath responsibilities, it is entirely legitimate to claim, as Leviticus 26:34–35 does, that the pain, shame, and suffering of Babylonian exile are linked to the Israelites’ “theft” of the land—their refusal to provide Sabbath rest for the land. By forfeiting the Sabbath, Israel ceases to be a nation devoted to and representative of God.

Given the utmost gravity of this command, it is clear that there must be more to it than simply taking a break from our regular routines. Sabbath observance is not merely a leisurely add-on to balance out an otherwise busy or frantic week, but rather the key that opens life to its fullest and best potential. We need to understand the overall religious trajectory that calls forth this command as something vital in the life of a follower

of God and also dear to the heart of God. What does Sabbath observance aim to get us to see, feel, appreciate, and do? Why does the failure of Sabbath observance lead to religious breakdown and, we are to assume, the breakdown of life itself?

Sabbath Creation

When most people think about the Sabbath, they turn to the Ten Commandments, for here, in the fourth commandment, we are given explicit instruction.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

(Exod. 20:8–11)

This command takes us back to the founding of the created order itself, showing us that Sabbath observance is not an incidental part of life. In fact it takes us to reality’s core meaning and purpose, showing us what the whole of creation is ultimately for. By understanding the Sabbath we better appreciate who God is and what the character of all created life is. We begin to learn, in other words, what it is that God finally wants and expects of us.

To appreciate this, we need to change significantly the way we normally think about creation and God’s creative work. As the story is usually told, God creates the whole world in six days by majestically speaking it into existence. God utters into ordered being light and darkness, the sky, waters and dry land, vegetation, sunshine and moonlight, and every kind of living creature in the sea, in the air, and on the land. On the sixth day, after creating the wild animals of the land, God creates *adam* (male and female humanity) according to God’s own image. Humanity is then given the command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

A logical progression in this six-day pattern suggests humanity as the climax, even the fulfillment, of God’s creative work. After all, humans are created last in the line of succession, and God has saved the best—the most important—for last. With the creation of humanity God is finished,

suggesting that we are the crowning touch. Humans, on this view, are the kings and queens of the heap because God has put us in charge. Everything below—the lakes, forests, soil, grasslands, fish, wild and domestic animals—has been given to us to do with as we see fit. We are to have dominion over every living thing.

This popular telling of the story is somewhat misleading because it overlooks important details and makes mistaken assumptions. For starters, it is tempting, especially in an industrial and technological age like our own, to assume our dominion means something like outright or total control. The Hebrew context, however, was agricultural. As the second creation story of Genesis 2:4–24 makes abundantly clear (by building upon the first), to be an authentic *adam* is to be intimately tied to the ways of soil (*adamah*), to be attuned to the soil's limits and possibilities. Farmers do not exercise dominion over their animals and fields by simply imposing or forcing their desires upon them. Dominion, if it is to be successful, depends on the farmer's cooperating and working with the life forms under his or her care. Indeed, dominion without patient and informed affection quickly leads to ruination, as fields are compromised and livestock become sick and die.

Far from being an excuse to do with creation as we want, the exercise of dominion is the practical training ground in which we learn to live patiently and attentively with others so that the mutual flourishing of all becomes possible. In a very important and practical sense, the vocation of humanity to have dominion will have to be worked out in the twin contexts of careful gardening, of tilling and keeping (even serving) the garden of paradise (Gen. 2:15), and the spiritual and moral work of conforming our lives to the life of God and thereby becoming the concrete manifestation or image of God (Gen. 1:26). As Terence Fretheim has proposed, humanity's most fundamental task is to share (however imperfectly) in God's continuing creative work of fashioning a livable and lovable world: "having dominion and subduing are understood *originally* as completely positive for the life of other creatures."¹ Indeed, as bound up in a common membership of creation, we are responsible in certain respects for the continuing becoming of creation.

Another crucial point is that God frequently stops to proclaim each day's creative work as "good." After the creation of everything together, its goodness is given special emphasis by God's declaring that "indeed, it was very good" (1:31). Clearly what is being communicated here is God's excitement and enthusiasm for what is being created. It thus makes sense to suggest, as Richard Lowery has, that God finds the whole of creation to be not only good but *delightful*, the occasion for intense and sustained joy.² It needs to be stressed, too, that God does not single out humanity as *more* delightful than all the rest. To be sure, humans will have a unique role

to play in the ordering of creation, a vocation we can summarily describe as concretely representing and manifesting (imaging) God's intentions for creation. But their role does not by itself or automatically make them more delightful. In fact, and as the biblical witness makes abundantly clear, insofar as humans do not properly live out their vocation to be God's image on earth—when they destroy or become violent and arrogant—they become the occasion for God's greatest sorrow and pain.

Another detail, frequently unnoticed, is that God was not quite finished with the creation on the sixth day. Near the end of the story we are told that God finished once on the sixth day, but then again on the seventh. Why would there be a need to finish something twice? What would be the significance of a second finishing? Quoting from a midrash, the medieval rabbi Rashi claimed that after the six days of divine work creation was not yet complete. What it lacked, and thus what remained to be created, was *menuha*, the rest, tranquillity, serenity, and peace of God. In the biblically informed mind, *menuha* suggests the sort of happiness and harmony that come from things being as they ought to be; we hear in *menuha* resonances with the deep word *shalom*. It is this capacity for happiness and delight, rather than humanity, which sits as the crowning achievement of God's creative work. It is as though by creating *menuha* on the seventh day God gathered up all previous delight and gave it to creation as its indelible stamp. *Menuha*, not humanity, completes creation. God's rest or *shabbat*, especially when understood within a *menuha* context, is not simply a cessation from activity but rather the lifting up and celebration of everything.³ Here we see God in a most personal (and exuberant) image, like a parent frolicking with a child and in this joy and play demonstrating an abiding commitment to protect, sustain, encourage, and love into health and maturity the potential latent within the child.

The creation of *menuha* is not a divine afterthought. Nor should it be viewed in a passive way, as a mere withdrawal from exertion. God's rest on the seventh day did not amount to a pulling back but rather a deep sympathy, harmony, and celebration with all that was there. In so delighting in the splendor of creation, God invites creatures to bask in the glory of the divine life. In a most important way, therefore, the creation of *menuha* gave to the whole of creation its ultimate purpose and meaning. Without *menuha* creation, though beautiful, would be without an all-encompassing, eternal objective, which is to participate in the life of God forever. And so what Sabbath *menuha* does is give us a positive vision of the world's goodness, a vision in which there is no fear, distrust, or strife. There is rather a celebration of, and a sharing in, God's own experience of delight.

Sabbath, being the climax of creation, is thus the goal toward which all our living should move. It is not merely an interlude within life, but

rather its animating heart, suffusing every moment with the potential for joy and peace. It is the interpretive key that helps us understand what all the moments and members of life mean. It gives aim and direction to life so that we know how and where we are to move. Life's fullness or happiness cannot be achieved in the absence of divine delight. It is what God wants for us and for all creation. Abraham Joshua Heschel put this point beautifully when he said, "All our life should be a pilgrimage to the seventh day; the thought and appreciation of what this day may bring to us should be ever present in our minds. For the Sabbath is the counterpoint of living; the melody sustained throughout all agitations and vicissitudes which menace our conscience; our awareness of God's presence in the world."⁴ Insofar as we genuinely experience Sabbath *menuha*, we catch a glimpse of eternity, a taste of heaven.

We can now begin to see why Sabbath observance is of the greatest significance and why our refusal to heed it is a great threat. In its practice, what we are finally doing is opening ourselves up to the happiness of God and letting God's intentions for *menuha* take precedence over our own ways. To refuse the Sabbath is to close the world in upon ourselves, by making it yield to our (often self-serving) desires and designs, and to cut ourselves off from God's presence and purpose. In our arrogant fantasies of dominating the whole creation, we forestall life and precipitate death. To forget or deny Sabbath is thus to withhold our lives from their most authentic purposes in God. It is to claim that our worrisome ways are better or count more than the intentions of God. It is to put ourselves at the center of creation—the very definition of sinfulness—rather than God's own delight.

Sabbath Freedom

One way to read ancient Israelite history, but also Christian attempts at church formation, is as a long, complex narrative in the ways of faith and faithlessness. Our propensity to sin—to put ourselves and our agendas, fears, anxieties, and desires first—is so strong and pervasive that in many cases we do not even appreciate that by denying God we also deny life. We do not see, let alone acknowledge, how our sin wreaks havoc with the biological and social world and brings pain to others and to God. We need help: prophetic witness, ritual remembrance, and concrete practice that will cause us to see, then critique and reorient, our action and desire in light of God's overall plan. For this purpose the Sabbath is vital.

Consider the way Deuteronomy's version of the Ten Commandments casts Sabbath observance. After beginning much like the version in Exodus 20, with the command that all people and animals rest from their work on the seventh day, this version ends: "Remember that you were a slave

in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15). This ending, rather than tying Sabbath observance to the fulfillment of creation's overall goal and purpose, links the Sabbath to the founding and the purpose of Israel as a nation liberated by and called to serve God. Israel should not be like Egypt, and one of the clearest ways to see the difference will be that Israel practices Sabbath and Egypt does not.

As is well known, the liberation of Israel from Egypt was a formative event for the nation. By vanquishing Egyptian power and might God would now make possible an alternate form of power, one founded on peace and fidelity rather than violence and distrust. In order for this power to become manifest in Israel's economic and political life, however, the people would first need to learn what it means and what it entails. The training period began with forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

(Deut. 8:2-3)

The reference to manna is especially important. While in the wilderness the Israelites had to learn what it means to depend upon God for every good and perfect gift. They had to understand that the blessings they lived by did not come from the work of their own hands but were instead concrete signs of God's care and concern.

One of the clearest ways to consider this is again to think about food. Food is not a "product" but a gift that we must nurture. Ultimately, as every good farmer and gardener knows, whether or not we will have food is beyond our control. The best that we can do is practice patience and trust, attention and responsibility, before the processes of life and growth. In the wilderness the Israelites would start their religious formation by learning that with something as basic as food they could not live from the might of their own hands. They were entirely dependent upon God to provide for them. And this God did every day. Each morning, as the Israelites awakened, they would find a day's supply of manna on the ground for them to gather. It was always enough to take care of their daily needs.

The Israelites were expressly forbidden to hoard more than a day's supply (perhaps with the intention of profiteering from the excess or from

From Sabbath to Sunday

■ It is tempting for Christians to think that with the birth of Jesus Christ Sabbath observance became something of the past. After all, at various points in the Gospels we see that Jesus ignored Sabbath law so that he might do his work. For instance, Jesus defends his disciples when they pluck grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–8), while he himself on the Sabbath heals a man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:9–14) and a crippled woman (Luke 13:10–17). Moreover, Jesus notes that “the sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath” (Mark 2:27–28, cf. Matt. 12:8 and Luke 6:5). This seems to suggest that the Sabbath is put beneath him, is perhaps even put away for good. Though Sabbath observance may have been of value and importance to the Jews, the time inaugurated by Christ no longer requires it.

This interpretation of Jesus’s life and ministry, and its relation to the Sabbath, is a serious mistake. To be sure, historical evidence shows that the development of the Christian Sunday was not simply a gospel way of observing the Fourth Commandment. But this does not warrant the view that Sunday served as a better or improved replacement for the Sabbath. From a theological point of view, we should insist on continuity between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian “feast day.” Jürgen Moltmann rightly argues, “The Christian Sunday neither abolishes Israel’s sabbath, nor supplants it. . . . The Christian feast-day must rather be seen as the messianic

extension of Israel’s sabbath.”¹ Put succinctly, in the person of Jesus the Sabbath aspirations that heretofore guided the Israelites now find a most visible and compelling expression. If we want to see, feel, hear, taste, and touch what God’s delight in creation concretely amounts to, we can do no better than to consider the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. As the early medieval pope Saint Gregory the Great put it: “For us, the true Sabbath is the person of our Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ.”²

Creation in Christ

Uniquely Christian Sabbath teaching takes us to the inner heart of the world’s meaning, for in the incarnation of God in Christ the whole of creation is given a renewed, redemptive focus. Just as the Sabbath represents the climax or fulfillment of creation, so too Jesus reveals what God’s intentions for life have been all along. What does it mean to be a creature of God, and what are we to do with the life given us? How do we best live the life that will bring delight to God and health and peace to the whole of creation? The life and ministry of Jesus enable us to answer these questions in new ways, for now all of reality is to be reinterpreted in terms of the cross and the community of forgiveness and healing it makes possible. If we remember that, according to a Christian point of view, it is through Christ that “all things came into being” (John 1:3) and that “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20), then it becomes clear that creaturely life is most authentic or at its best when it shares in Christ’s own life, when it moves in a trajectory that lines up with his. As Christians we are to take our cues from Jesus on what is good and valuable for us to do, because he gives us a fresh glimpse and a practical manifestation of what the *menuha* of God looks like.

Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Dies Domini* (*The Day of the Lord*) makes very much the same point: Jesus does not obliterate Sabbath teaching but reframes it so that we can see once again, with renewed emphasis, what creation’s ultimate meaning is. John Paul writes: “The Paschal Mystery of Christ is the full revelation of the mystery of the world’s origin, the climax of the history of salvation and the anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment of the world.” The Lord’s Day is the key to every day that has been, that is now, and that is yet to come. Christ is the inner meaning of all history. He gives it its most authentic direction and purpose. Every day of our lives should be lived through the life of Christ, since it is in terms of his loving and sacrificial life that we now know what life is for. Christ calls us and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live lives that are abundant and free, no longer given over to arrogance,

anxiety, ill-health, or violent struggle. Jesus comes to us not as a thief who wants to kill, steal, and destroy; rather, he says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

"Creation in Christ" inaugurates a fundamentally different ordering of reality from the one we might choose for ourselves. Our ways of ordering, premised as they are on self-promotion and the tools of exploitation and control, inevitably lead to violence and death. The way of Christ, which is the way creation is supposed to be, inaugurates a new kind of reality no longer dependent or parasitic upon violence. James Alison has put this well: "It is not as though creation were a different act, something which happened alongside the salvation worked by Jesus, but rather that the salvation which Jesus was working was, at the same time, the fulfillment of creation."³ Jesus's resurrection life puts in place a new kind of life that has implications for everyone. Clearly, the abundant and full life that Jesus represents is not yet completely realized in our midst. Here and now we will continue to experience pain and suffering. But in the midst of this pain the cross stands as a sign of both judgment and hope.

To appreciate this point we need to understand how the cross "shows up our world for what it really is, what we have made it. It is a world in which it is dangerous, even fatal, to be human; a world structured by violence and fear." Jesus most fully reveals what it is to be human: to lose ourselves in love and to be obedient to what love calls us to do. But it is precisely our fear of loss of control and our lack of faith that compel us to crucify him and thus keep at bay the obedience to and gratitude for God's love that his life represents. The stunning claim of Christianity, however, is that our violent efforts do not defeat God's love for us. Christ's resurrection means that love keeps coming and is made available to us so that the relations frayed or destroyed by us can again be made healthy and whole. "Through the risen Christ the Spirit is poured out upon all men, or, to put it another way, the relationship between Jesus and the Father . . . is extended to all men."⁴

Sabbath Salvation

If we are to speak this way we must broaden the scope of Christ's redemptive work beyond personal postmortem salvation to include the restoration of creation as a whole. Here we do well to remember that early Christians thought of the Lord's Day as a "little Easter" celebration. Sunday is a feast day because in it we celebrate the "new creation" made possible by the resurrection of Christ from the dead (scripture suggests that Christ's resurrection took place the first day after the Sabbath, making Sunday the first day of the week). Christ's ministry is not an add-on to

God's creative work. Rather, and given the gospel's proclamation that all things are created through Christ, it represents the fulfillment of created life. Through the power of the resurrection all things can become "new," meaning they can become most fully what they were always and originally meant to be. We become sick and tired, distorted and destroyed, as we turn away from God's original creative intention. Christ's hand in creation, now combined with Christ's earthly ministry, lets us know how we can be renewed and thus show forth what God wanted of us all along. By following Christ's example we gradually enter into the *menuha* of God.

If this interpretation is correct, we need to move beyond the highly individualistic notion of salvation that many of us assume—that Jesus is significant because of the salvation he makes possible for individual believers. It is important to understand that the church early on worked to combat precisely this tendency. The work of Christ extends to and links up with the whole of creation. Maximus the Confessor (580–662), for instance, argued that God's incarnation in creation was present from the beginning of time as the divine *logos* or truth permeating an intelligible, ordered world (the *logoi* of creation). In Jesus Christ this same *logos* "became flesh" and thus joined the ranks of humanity. Far from being an abrupt interruption in the orders of creation, the life of Jesus Christ is thus in seamless continuity with it.

This view casts salvation within a much larger framework. The *logos* of God is not at work solely within human lives; it is present and effective throughout all creation. In the person Jesus we see God's interaction with creation expressed in a most intimate, intense, and bodily way. As John McDade summarizes it, God's nearness to creation presents salvation "as the restoration of creaturely equilibrium, and subordinates human reality within the framework of the world's natural processes." Christ, in other words, does not take us out of creation to save us, but rather saves us precisely by enabling us to enter more fully and more harmoniously into it, and then to find in this deep immersion the reality of God. "The specific history of God's action in Jesus is, therefore, the focus of intensification, the moment within the process which illuminates the whole, and which exemplifies the nature of the Creator/creation relationship."⁵

With this encompassing context in mind, it becomes all the more significant for us to recall that Jesus performed many of his miracles on the Sabbath. The question is why. Was it simply to irritate the religious leaders of the day? A better explanation is to see the miracles as specific people—creation in miniature—being set right to be what God intends. In the miracles of healing, feeding, restoration, exorcism, and raising from the dead, Jesus is revealing creation's inner directionality or purpose and bringing it to completion. Jesus is communicating God's continuing creativity in the world, a creativity informed by divine love and care.

John's Gospel has Jesus say, on the Sabbath no less, "My Father is still working, and I also am working" (5:17). Jesus, in other words, is filling a lack or repairing a distortion in creation. His whole life and his going to death represent the putting right of creation. His pronouncement from the cross, "It is finished," is a reference not simply to his own life but to the life of the whole world. Again, Alison has stated this well: "Creation itself has been brought to fulfillment by his self-giving up to death in order to open up for us a creative way by which we may come to participate fully in creation. It can be understood, then, why the resurrection happens on the first day of the week, in the garden. Creation has started again, a creation in which the tomb is empty."⁶ What is finished is not simply a personal life but the whole complex network of patterns of behavior that lead to violent crucifixion. What is opened up is the possibility of resurrection life, life that is completely open to the peaceful, reconciling ways of God.

The depth and breadth of God's salvific intentions become clear if we consider the story of Christ's healing of the ten lepers recorded in Luke 17:11–19.⁷ While walking between the regions of Samaria and Galilee, Jesus is approached by lepers who call out for mercy. They need care and help not only because they are physically ill but they also bear the pain of social alienation. As physically unclean, they are cut off from membership in the wider social community. In their bodies and in their relationships, they are disfigured and denied, unable to live out the goodness of God's creative intention. Sensing their desperate need, Jesus instructs them to show themselves to the priests, knowing that their reentry into the larger social body will depend on the priests' judgment and proclamation of their physical cleansing.

Luke tells us that as the lepers went to the priests they were "made clean." The term used is *katharidzō*, which means to purify but also to declare ritually acceptable. What we see here is that Jesus was concerned with these persons' physical, bodily health—the leper who comes back to thank Jesus sees that his body is "healed" or "cured," restored to its proper biological functioning (*iaomaī*)—but also with their restoration as full members into the social body. We do not live alone or as rugged individualists. We need each other and depend upon the sympathy and support we provide to each other. In a very real sense, the health of human living, its success and fulfillment, depends upon the health and wholeness of the many relations that bodily existence requires.

The broad and deep conditions of health implied here need to be emphasized. Luke's story tells us that health is in membership rather than isolation. Membership with whom? It is tempting to limit the range of our memberships to as small a circle as possible, because this is a natural way to maximize control over our own lives. This is why we prefer to be part

of groups that are like-minded or make few demands of us. The ministry of Christ, however, shows us that our memberships go far and wide to include those who are not like us—people of other cultures and races (the leper who thanked Jesus was a Samaritan), the unclean, the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised—those who do not count according to our scales of importance. It even extends to nonhuman life, for we are embodied and cannot possibly live well if the nutrients that feed us—animals, plants, water, soil, and air—are sickly or in decline. We need to remember the principle that was well-known in ancient or traditional cultures: bodily health includes the health of the many bodies, human and nonhuman, we necessarily live with. We are members of creation, and our well-being depends on the health of the whole creation. We are foolish if we think that we can be whole at the expense or in violation of the broader creation. Wholeness is a precondition for health, which is a precondition for delight and celebration. There can be no complete *menuha* in a context of dismemberment or devastation.

There is, however, a third, and most expansive and fundamental, dimension to the healing that takes place in Luke's story. Jesus engages the Samaritan leper who returned to give thanks by asking what happened to the other nine. He wonders why they have not thought to stop to offer similar thanks and praise. Jesus is clearly dismayed by their blindness and their unwillingness to acknowledge and act upon the fact that our health, indeed the means of all our living, is finally a gift. We need to ask if our own ingratitude would not be a cause of God's continuing dismay. Though these lepers experience a dramatic bodily healing (the social healing has not yet taken place) as their leprosy is cured, the fact of the matter is that every time we eat, drink, and breathe, we experience and participate in the grace of health. Every time we experience the help of the social body, we encounter the blessings of social membership. All wholeness, in the end, is a reflection of a gracious God who cares for us all by showering us with the gifts of bodies, food, and community. To be healthy in any way whatsoever is, whether we appreciate it or not, to bear witness to God's continuing involvement in the maintenance and wholeness of creation. If we are attentive, our whole lives should be one long act of thanksgiving and praise.

Luke ends this story with Jesus's telling the leper, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." This time the leper's health is termed *sōdzō*, which is the word used for salvation. The leper's life is "saved" because it is now made well and preserved in terms of God's own life. In an important sense, the leper's faith has marked his own living with a participation in God's life. His trust in the provision of God, his thankfulness for God's care, and his loud praising (Luke 17:15) of God's graciousness indicate that he no longer sees his life in terms of himself.

He is no longer like the dullards of Psalm 92: he has shifted his frame of reference from himself to God's overarching intentions. His gratitude and praise to God confirm that a Sabbath sensibility is dawning within his mind. The wholeness of bodily and social relations made possible by Christ's healing word is now made complete by a wholeness of relationship with God. In Luke's view there is no such thing as partial wholeness. The abundant life that Jesus proclaims entails the conviviality and peace of the whole creation before its Creator.

Put succinctly, salvation, understood as the goal toward which all life moves, is integrally tied to *menuha* as the experience of God's delight in creation wonderfully made. Salvation is the always new recapitulation of the tranquillity, peace, and joy that marked the first Sabbath. To be saved is to participate in and enjoy God's life as it is intended for all creation. It is to realize here and now as much as possible what God has wanted and hoped for us from the beginning of time.

New Life

Another way to understand Christ's work as the origination, continuation, and fulfillment of God's creative design is to recall that for the early church father John of Damascus, the work of creation could best be understood as God's "making room" for what is not God to share in God's joyous and peaceful life. God's creative work, on this view, resembles one long and lavish act of hospitality, a welcoming and a sustaining of life within a context of unfathomable grace and goodness. In an important sense, Christ's ministry is the radical, most fundamental and concrete, expression of what divine, but also earthly, hospitality must be for us: the welcome of all to the banquet of life; service to all in need and who suffer; and the celebration of our life together blessed by God's continuing care. Jesus models for us in a most practical way what God's original and abiding hospitality looks like. Our most important task as disciples is to open the table of welcome to others, not because the table of gifts is ours to give but because we are always already beneficiaries of and witnesses to grace upon grace. When we do this, we say yes to God's invitation to joy.

Our gathering together on Sunday is thus of the deepest significance, for in it we are empowered by God to extend the love that sustains and brought creation into being. When we offer this gift of love to others, we are really creating a space for them to become themselves and to most fully realize their God-given potential. In this work we mirror God's own creativity, which simply and without coercion lets the world be. "Love is the space in which to expand, and it is always a gift. In this sense we

receive ourselves at the hands of others. . . . To give love is to give the precious gift of nothing, space. To give love is to let be."⁸

Sunday is the Lord's Day, which means that on this day we set aside time to make sure that Christ is indeed the Lord of our living and not we ourselves. We gather together so that we can better learn what Christ's lordship means for us in the midst of our everyday living. We begin to see that the life of Christ was above all devoted to the overcoming of forces that destroy or disfigure life—hunger, disease, demon possession, anger, envy, alienation—and the promotion of personal and communal dispositions and practices that nurture and facilitate a complete or maximal life. As the apostle Paul puts it, those who follow Christ will manifest the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). These are the traits of those who have made Christ's ministries of feeding, healing, exorcism, reconciliation, sharing, and inclusion part of their own daily walk.

Sunday is the day when Christ's followers most visibly gather to pledge their allegiance to the ways of Jesus. Yet the activity of being a church, the work of discipleship and hospitality, is not confined to that one day. Pope John Paul II suggests that we view Sunday as the training ground that prepares us to go into the week and there mirror Christ: "the whole of Sunday becomes a great school of charity, justice and peace." The real test of our allegiance and commitment occurs in the everyday, as we work with colleagues, raise our kids, care for our elderly, construct our built environments, tend to our lands and waters, and do our shopping. These are the places where the feast of the "new creation" is either realized or not. These are the times when Christ's resurrection power comes to fruition or not.

Our world mostly fails to mirror the health of wholeness that would constitute God's salvation. Though God's resurrection power has been unleashed in the person of Jesus Christ, we still await the time when God's "new creation" is fully realized. As Romans 8 puts it, creation is in a state of "eager longing," waiting to come out of its current condition of suffering and futility. It is in "bondage to decay" (v. 21), due to the effects of sin and violence that have been at work since the time of Adam. For this reason several of the early church fathers, Basil and Augustine among them, referred to Sunday as the "eighth day." Though Sunday is the first day of the week, in terms of the seven-day creation of the world it also stands beyond creation as its final summation or conclusion. We should, therefore, think of Sunday as an intensification of the Sabbath, a new beginning for creation, because it represents "the age to come." It is an eschatological reality, which means that on this day Jesus has opened up new possibilities for genuine life, possibilities that have been set in motion but are not yet fully complete. The *menuha* of God that shone

upon God's original creation will once again, because of the redemption made possible by Christ, usher in a time and place of peace and delight. Augustine, writing very near the end of his *Confessions* (and referring to 2 Thess. 3:16), called this "the peace of quietness, the peace of the sabbath, a peace with no evening" (13.50).

This way of speaking reinforces the Sabbath view that the goal of all life is to find its rest in God. What distinguishes Sunday from the Sabbath is that the path to this rest is through the cross of Christ. The incarnation of God in Christ opens up fresh possibilities for realizing a Sabbath vision here and now. Hebrews 4 suggests that as Christians we are called to enter into the rest made possible by Christ. Christ is for us the image of eternity, the true light of the world that enables us to see clearly and without ambiguity what creation means and what it is finally for.

Given that Christ's resurrection rest follows after the suffering of the cross and is a vindication of the power of life over death, the Eucharist, the weekly celebration of the risen Christ, is central to Sunday observance. As we eat the body broken for us and drink the blood shed on our behalf, we proclaim the living power of God to break the bonds of sin and death that pervert and destroy creation's memberships. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we express our hope in the power of God's love to enter and strengthen our relationships with each other so that they better reflect God's peace and delight. Here we acknowledge and live out God's intentions for us and thus bear witness to God's primordial joy in a creation that is "very good."

It is helpful to link the celebration at the "Lord's Table" with the divine hospitality that marked, and continues to impress itself upon, God's first creative work. The experience of the Eucharist is an experience of communion. It is the time when we recall and celebrate our many memberships with each other and with God our Creator. We prepare with acts of forgiveness in which we acknowledge and commit ourselves to end the anxiety and arrogance, the pettiness and aggression that testify to our perennial sinfulness. At the Lord's Table we open ourselves to the gifts of God and each other, recognizing that it is through these gifts, and not through our own efforts or by our own right, that we truly live. Rowan Williams says it well: "In the resurrection community, the fellowship of the Spirit, the creative and sustaining power of God is shown to be identical with the compassion and forgiveness that renews and reconstitutes the relations of human beings with each other."⁹

The forgiveness here talked about is of a most practical sort. I recall once hearing a woman describe how at her church, before the moment of Communion, the entire fellowship formed a large circle. Each member then went down the line to every other member, asking if there was need for forgiveness between them, and if so offering it. Clearly this was

a lengthy affair, as encounters between some people revealed conflict, animosity, or jealousy. But it was a valuable moment in the life of the congregation, making clear and honest the relationships that bind us to each other, and allowed healing and strengthening to take place. When we wound each other, whether knowingly or not, we disfigure and maim the whole body, making it less likely that it will be a community of hospitality for others.

Sunday peace and rest, much like Sabbath peace and rest, extend to the whole creation. The Leviticus code made it clear that animals and the land needed their rest too: true rest is never at the cost of another's exploitation or misery. Given that we are embodied beings, our living is always implicated in the living of other, nonhuman bodies. We need to pause and look carefully and patiently—going down the line of habitats and animal life—to determine how our actions impair creation's memberships.

Paul clarifies that resurrection hope is not restricted to the human community. All creation will be set free from its bondage to decay. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption [*apolutrōsis*—setting free or deliverance] of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22–23). What Paul is suggesting here is that sin prevents the members of creation from becoming what God has intended for them to be. As a result, the membership of creation as a whole is thwarted. Its existence, rather than causing God delight and joy, ushers in pain and sadness. The hope of the resurrection—the hope that love's power is victorious over the ways of sin—lets us know that creation as a whole and we ourselves are not fated to live this way forever. The ways of forgiveness and sacrificial love make possible our liberation from the distortion and destruction that sin is, so that we can again live in ways that will cause God to delight. This redemption is not for disembodied souls that escape or rise above creation. Rather, Christ's redemptive power is always at work at the level of our bodies, and the bodies of all members of creation that together make life possible.

Sunday, far from being the obliteration of Sabbath teaching, represents a profound rearticulation of God's overarching purpose and plan for creation. Sunday is our day of joy, for here we remember our memberships one with another and commit ourselves to the health and wholeness—the salvation—of physical and social bodies, of communities and creation, made possible by Christ's resurrection power and redeeming love.

Rossetti's *Maude: Prose and Verse* and a reference guide to the writings on Christina Rossetti.

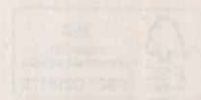
BETTY S. FLOWERS is Professor of English and a member of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers at the University of Texas at Austin. She is a native Texan with degrees from the University of Texas and the University of London. Her publications include *Browning and the Modern Tradition* and *Extending the Shade* (poetry), and articles on Donald Barthelme, Adrienne Rich, Christina Rossetti, poetry therapy, writing, politics and myth, among other subjects. She has edited *Daughters and Fathers* (with Lynda Boose), as well as a number of television tie-in books and global scenarios.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

The Complete Poems

Text by R. W. CRUMP

Notes and Introduction by BETTY S. FLOWERS



PENGUIN BOOKS