

Season 4 Episode 2: Defining Place

Speaker 1 [00:00:05] Welcome to the Embedded Church podcast, where we share stories about reweaving the connections between place, the built environment and the mission of God.

Speaker 2 [00:00:15] Season four of the Embedded Church podcast is produced in partnership with the Ormond Center at Duke Divinity School. The mission of Ormond Center is to foster the imagination, will and ability of congregations and communities to be agents of thriving.

Speaker 1 [00:00:28] I'm Eric Jacobsen.

Speaker 2 [00:00:30] And I'm Sarah Joy and will be your host on today's episode of the Embedded Church podcast.

Speaker 1 [00:00:42] Hey Sarah Joy

Speaker 2 [00:00:43] Hey, how's it going?

Speaker 1 [00:00:44] It's going good. So what if I told you that place is a dirty word?

Speaker 2 [00:00:49] Eric, I feel like this is deja vu or Groundhog Day all over again. I don't know. Maybe it's just Kobe and the year that it's been. But I'm pretty sure you made this case last episode when it came to Siloam. So, yeah, I don't know how it's a dirty word. I want to go there with you.

Speaker 1 [00:01:08] All right. Well, let me try to make my case by telling you a story. OK, so I'm at a church in Tacoma and we have a lot of folks at this church from other places, one couple from Texas. Texans are a little peculiar, especially about their place. Yeah, awesome.

Speaker 2 [00:01:27] If that's what you mean by peculiar. Yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:01:29] Anyway, this couple is expecting a baby and the husband in this scenario was particularly proud of the place they were from, namely Texas. And so he had brought a Ziploc bag filled with Texas soil that he was planning to put under the hospital bed where his wife would deliver their babies so that he could say his child was born on Texas soil. And that is awesome.

Speaker 2 [00:01:55] Only leave it to a Texan to do that.

Speaker 1 [00:01:57] So here's my case. This guy was so committed to his place that he needed to move some dirt from that place in order to make sure his child was connected to that place. So dirt placed there, all super connected.

Speaker 2 [00:02:10] OK, OK. I can see some connections there. I just have to say, I do love the smell of Texas dirt, you know, in the dirt from Texas smells a certain way.

Speaker 1 [00:02:22] I'm going to regret I use that example, but

Speaker 2 [00:02:24] they go, you'll never live it down. So I could see that. Let's bring this idea back to this analogy that we described in Episode one. So Wendell Berry has this bucket, right. And we use that to talk about Siloam initially because this bucket is collecting all of this debris, these natural pieces of the local environment into this bucket. And it's creating dirt, creating Siloam right up there. Now, we're going to expand that a little bit more because Siloam is going to look different with different places, is what you're saying. So, like, Bury's bucket is probably going to have some like Hickory and different things like that. Your bucket in Tacoma, maybe some pine needles here in St. Paul. We're going to have probably some maple trees. I don't know I don't know my trees super well in St. Paul, to be honest.

Speaker 1 [00:03:17] Different dirt in Kentucky, different dirt in St. Paul, different dirt in Tacoma. All that dirt is going to grow things in a different way. Different things are going to grow better in those three different locations because the dirt and that's where that's replaced comes in. Right. There's different things that make Tecoma special, different things that make St. Paul special, different things that make Kentucky special. And when we describe, Shulem, as rightness of relationship, rightness of all sorts of things, that's just going to look different in our different places.

Speaker 2 [00:03:51] Yeah. So place breeds particular type of dirt.

Speaker 1 [00:03:56] Yeah, exactly. So place is a dirty word. So I think it would be sort of interesting on that cue for us to maybe talk a little bit about what makes our places delightful and shallow, like in our particular locations, and maybe flesh this out a little bit.

Speaker 2 [00:04:10] Right. My place is even so important for understanding how we work to make sure. Yeah, OK, I'll give it to you, Eric. I guess I'll give it to you particularly. Really, just because you told a story about a Texan, which is awesome.

Speaker 1 [00:04:24] That was intentional. Yes.

Speaker 2 [00:04:26] All right. Let's go with it. Hey, Eric, I've gotten to know you a bit over these past few years and I'm realizing that I don't actually know how many churches you have served as a pastor.

Speaker 1 [00:04:45] I have served all of two churches as a pastor.

Speaker 2 [00:04:48] Where are they located?

Speaker 1 [00:04:50] So my first call was in Missoula, Montana, one of the greatest places in the world. And my second call, Tacoma, Washington, also one of the greatest places in the world.

Speaker 2 [00:05:02] All right, well, I haven't been to Missoula, actually. I've never even been to Tacoma, Seattle area. Yeah, but they both look beautiful from what I've seen. So how did you decide whether or not you were called to a particular church?

Speaker 1 [00:05:18] Yeah, it's a great question. So pastors, depending on the tradition kind of interview for jobs, whenever I had an interview at some point during the interview, I would always ask the church to to answer what would I run into within a five minute walk of the front door of the church? What types of businesses or would there be any businesses, what variety of building types and all that

Speaker 2 [00:05:40] which that seems like a pretty unusual question from a pastor. So tell us a bit more. Why were you asking that?

Speaker 1 [00:05:45] Absolutely. I'm really after a couple of things with that question. One is, I truly want to know what the neighborhood's like. And I'm particularly interested in like a mixed use neighborhood and a better church, a church that's like right there, not surrounded by a big parking lot, but right there in the middle. That's the kind of church I tend to be drawn to. But secondly, you know how readily they can answer the question tells me how tuned they are into the particular location that their churches, the geography around the church, if they're really aware of it or if they're connected with the neighborhood where they live, but they aren't really connected to much of the neighborhood of the church. I think in a way, what I'm looking for is the place, the sense of place that they have for the neighborhood places is our topic today. So that's kind of what I'm thinking about that. But I thought place is one of those words that we use all the time, but maybe we don't actually know what it means or if we're asked to define it, we would have a hard time. And it's often confused with other notions like space. So I was wondering if you wouldn't mind taking a crack at explaining to our listeners what place means? How is it different from space?

Speaker 2 [00:06:48] Yeah, definitely. This is one of my favorite things to talk about because so often we haven't spent a lot of time thinking about it. But there are differences between these two words. So space is usually something that I would say is empty or generic. I also talk about it being limitless or not having much in terms of boundaries. So you can think of that in terms of like outer space or virtual space, the World Wide Web. All of that. But place is something that is much smaller, defined. What is really important to think about with place is a lot of times it develops around shared stories or cultural meanings. For example, with a lot of people, give and I often share is a baseball field. So baseball field, when you don't have bases or stands or fans, it's really just an empty field. But as soon as you draw those baselines and you start a game and you have rules and kind of a cultural understanding of this American pastime of baseball, it takes on suddenly a whole new meaning. And so you get something like iconic places like Wrigley Field. That's one way to think about the difference between space and place. Yeah, and

Speaker 1 [00:07:53] I was going to Wrigley Field. I think that's a beautiful picture of place. And I think it reflects really well how a place holds onto memories. I can imagine somebody who's a huge baseball fan showing up to Wrigley Field or taking their kids back to Wrigley Field and recounting like experiences and memories would be a really powerful kind of thing. Those memories are anchored.

Speaker 2 [00:08:12] There was definitely I think that's really important to understand the difference between space and place, because I do think that there's a relationship to what we believe as Christians and how God sets up place in the Bible. And I'd be curious to hear from you, Eric, as a pastor, what is the importance of place in the Bible that you really draw on?

Speaker 1 [00:08:35] I think it's super important to the Bible. In fact, I think a case could be made that it's like a central theme that runs throughout the whole scripture if you're paying attention to it. So one way into that conversation is to think about Jesus's promise that he's going to prepare a place for us. Our eternal existence is going to be in this place is good environment where we have communion with God and with each other. And that's this evocative image. But if you kind of wind back the recording from from where he said

that you think about God's creation, creates humans and places them in a garden and places them in a particular place, which is this really shalom filled kind of place where we can have communion with God, with each other.

Speaker 2 [00:09:13] And the garden had very specific boundaries, too, which is a fascinating thing to think about.

Speaker 1 [00:09:17] We had not this limitless thing and then the consequence of our disobedience, the curse was getting kicked out of that place. Right. So displacement is a curse. And then when you think about God's plan to redeem creation, redeem humanity, it starts with a promise to Abraham and that it's about you'd be the father of great nations. I'll bless you. But also it involves place. There'll be a land. You'll be a place where I'll take you to a place where we can have communion together. And again, when the Israelites are disobedient, the punishment is displacement. They get exiled. So it kind of goes back and forth and back and forth leading up to the coming of the Messiah and Jesus promises. He's bringing us to a place. And it all kind of culminates in the Book of Revelation, where that place gets revealed as the new heaven and Earth and the city of Jerusalem coming down, we find redemption, the end of the story is all in the context of place. So I see this shot through from the very beginning to the end. This powerful concept of redemption is wrapped up in place.

Speaker 2 [00:10:15] Yeah, that's really true. Can you talk about the goodness of place and the limitations of place and is there? Space for space to

Speaker 1 [00:10:25] be good, right? Absolutely. So, yeah, absolutely. And there's kind of two ways that that needs to be answered. I think to get a full picture from the Bible, one is having to do with just the realities of human existence and the goodness of our creation. One has to do with the problem of sin, and both of those would speak to how space is good and how place isn't always good. So starting with the first, I would say space in the Bible isn't always a bad thing. In fact, another theme that comes up a lot in the Bible is like the wilderness, like the yeah, the people of God go out in the wilderness. And that's a that can be a really formative time. That's where they really commune with God. And a lot of good things can happen in space. It doesn't seem like it's like a location that you're supposed to stay in forever. But it's an important, like growing time, I think that has a kind of analog in our lives. Like we really value plays, like we like our homes. We like the relationships that are really important to us. And but sometimes place becomes too crowded. And so we talk about how I need you to get some space right now. I need to go on retreat. I need to. And what we're saying when we say those things is we need to to open up some space, to breathe a bit, to to get some perspective, to learn some new things. And so I think,

Speaker 2 [00:11:38] yeah, have Jesus leaving the crowds and going off on his own space to meditate and praying.

Speaker 1 [00:11:46] And so space is really got a valuable role to play. And let's go to the other one. The place is good. That's what redemption happens. That place can also be kind of bad because of our sin. So it's a realm of creation that's infected with sin like anything else. And so as much as we like the idea of place, we have a lot of positive memories, especially marginalized populations. I think when they hear the word play, sometimes they hear oppression like, no, you need to stay in your place. We're going to keep you in your place. You don't belong in this place because you don't look like us. And

so there's some really horrible racism and any kind of oppressive power structures is going to use place as a way to oppress people down and keep them. Yeah.

Speaker 2 [00:12:30] And so that's I I've talked so many times about how place can be associated with shame so easily and thinking about even the ways that we as a society say, oh, you grew up on the wrong side of the tracks and how much shame can be associated with that.

Speaker 1 [00:12:45] So I tend to think of that's where the gospel needs to be a healing influence. To place itself is good in terms of concept. It's fallen. And so sometimes, you know, just as salvation happens in place, sometimes Jesus needs to redeem the oppression of place. And I think that conversation with the Samaritan woman that Jesus had at the woman at the well was really all about that. She's a Samaritan woman. She was excluded from Jerusalem. She couldn't worship there. So she thought she was excluded from God. And Jesus gave her a very liberating word, which is you can worship God in spirit and truth. It's not limited to place in that oppressive sense. And so he's really freeing her up from the oppression of place. But then she, too, will be part of those who are promised that he's going to prepare a place of inclusion for her as the rest of us are included. I think that really shows both sides of the coin there. So let's get into place. Listen, because I think that's something that's not really biblical, because I think it's part of our modern society and a lot of ways. But, yeah, I think it's a significant problem that stares us right in the face all the time. So can you tell our listeners a little bit or explain please listen to them.

Speaker 2 [00:13:48] Yeah. So please listen, this is neither place nor space and I would almost say it's rootless. And so in a forgotten history almost. So I think about even the Israelites when they're in the wilderness and in this space, they're still being called to set up Kerans to set up markers to really create a story there. And so it's not a place lessness for them. They're making place as they go about their wanderings in the wilderness. Purposelessness tends to be void of local culture. It tends to be void of story. So you think about anywhere America. I think that's how James Howard counselor talks about it, right? Yeah. The McDonalds sign where you look at that and you don't know where you are, you can't locate yourself. Our modern culture, like you said, has created this place less than this because it's really undermined any loyalty that we have to place or love a place, because we've become such advocates for independence and there's such a desire to accrue wealth and to do whatever it takes. And so I think we've really devalued place. And then unfortunately, too, we've designed places that are place less in many ways, like I said, anywhere America with your chain stores, your strip malls. And so that only feeds into that devaluing of place as well, because it's hard to value places that look like anywhere America, because you don't have those emotional ties or there's attachments or those memories associated with them as strongly as you do. A local coffee shop or grandma's house, but unfortunately, too, with this place lawlessness, I think what is so bad about it, honestly, is the fact that it creates this disorientation. And you touched on this earlier when you're talking about being in exile from the garden and just the been brought about this disorientation. And I think what's so key in that Genesis passage is that the first question that God asks of mankind is, where are you? And it's a question of orientation and whether or not they're aware of it at that moment. They can't place themselves because they have entered into exile. Now, we are seeing the repercussions of that through today as we're all looking for a return to home.

Speaker 1 [00:16:07] Yeah, absolutely. That's really interesting.

Speaker 2 [00:16:17] As we've talked about the importance of place and how it shows up in the Bible, why do you think that pastors should care about place as they are seeking to understand the Bible and lead others on that path?

Speaker 1 [00:16:29] The theme verse for this season has been Jeremiah twenty nine seven. Seek the welfare of the city or place. I've kind of replaced that word because I don't think it only applies to an urban environment to seek the welfare of the place to which you've been called. And I think that that really thinking about the specificity of the location where your church is or where your population is and place is really important, they're like, what are people proud of in this place? What's unique to only this place? And the more we know that, I think the better handle will have on how to bless the people that live there and work there and interact with that place. And the more we'll be able to participate as one of them, a sense of belonging, I think it's really important for pastors to ask place specific questions. I think it's really easy for pastors to get lost in sort of abstractions about how do we communicate the gospel to humanity, how do we bless humanity in general. But those questions become much more interesting and much more productive. I think if they're place specific, what is the good news sound like to the people who live here in this place? Yeah, I know you work with pastors a lot. I am a pastor, but I'm I kind of have only my own story to kind of reference. But you work with tons of pastors and try to help them to tune into the neighborhood and the place. What are some tricks that you've learned for helping pastors and congregations get tuned into the place where their churches are located?

Speaker 2 [00:17:54] Yeah, well, see, this isn't any sort of magical answer. It's always very simple. But I say begin with walking. And one of the ways that I encourage churches to think about challenging their congregation to do this as well is even considering a walk to church challenge. If they have congregants who live close enough, encourage them to do that and take notes along the way and pay attention to what you see and how you experience the sidewalks and the smells. Or if you have a church where most people drive and encourage them to park a couple of blocks away on a couple of sundaes and walk that distance into the church and again take notes on what they see and they experience. So I think making yourself available in public space is really important to really start to understand your place. Take the bus to church. That gives you a good sense of mobility in your neighborhood and whether or not places are truly accessible and what that's like as somebody without a car would have to experience potentially getting to work or getting to the grocery stores, sitting outside in the front, I mean, and hold your coffee hours out on the front line. So many times people are like huddled around the stinky basements and I don't understand that. So as much as possible put things outside, they go to a neighborhood association, meetings and listen and hear what are the concerns that are being raised and just really make yourself available to volunteer at the neighborhood association fairs and different events throughout the year. Those are always great ways to just meet people and get to know the community and understand it better.

Speaker 1 [00:19:29] I love it. Those are great ideas. What about, you know, another kind of ongoing theme with our podcast has been the built environment. How does the built environment intersect with this notion of place?

Speaker 2 [00:19:41] Well, that's a very good question and I probably will have a pretty extensive answer. So you're ready for this?

Speaker 1 [00:19:46] I'm ready. Bring it on.

Speaker 2 [00:19:49] There's so much connection because one of our greatest callings and gifts really comes from being made in the image of God. And as you mentioned earlier, God's first act was to create a place to create a habitat for humankind and animals and placed humanity. And so an extension of our calling is to develop places that proactively create Siloam or flourishing in the economic, physical and spiritual well-being of our neighborhoods. And this comes through so many things that we discussed on the first episode, which takes shape through our built environment. And that's things like access to affordable housing and jobs and healthy foods. And so many of these things that our foundational needs that we have as human beings that are gifts that God has given us, that we need these things and we come together in community to create places that really enable these needs to be met and enable us to flourish as human beings. And so I think that we need to design our places, understanding that those are really important parts of who we are as beings, created in the image of God. And we need to be aware of not designing places that rob us of those connections and that sever that flourishing and sever those relationships of being in creation with one another.

Speaker 1 [00:21:08] I wonder if we even thought about beyond just the creation of new places, but like supporting existing places, like shopping local, for instance. Right. That's going to over time, can have an impact on the viability of those businesses which occupy the local I mean, those just sort of exist in perpetuity. They need support. Going to local store is going to allow that local store to hopefully survive and thrive. Yeah. Allow me to continue to cultivate relationships with neighbors that go to that store and the store owner. And, you know, that's a place positive kind of move to make. If you can say

Speaker 2 [00:21:42] I have a friend who always says you vote with your dollars. Yeah. And I think that's really true. And I think it's a hard thing because buying locally does usually cost more. And so when I encourage people to do that, I do that with the recognition of the limitations that that has as well. But that's part of this holistic understanding of Shulem view of what does it mean to be good stewards of our finances and to prioritize some of these local investments over other things. And that might mean buying less of one thing than we normally would. But I think that's part of the call as Christians, to be really thinking holistically about our lifestyles and all the implications of the connections to the community and the way that the way we live either fosters better connections and healthier connections for us and for the local community or not. Yeah, and that's solved that a

Speaker 1 [00:22:42] lot of a lot of Christians want to have an influence on culture, but that feels like such a massive undertaking. You know, how do we change legislation? But I think when you bring your scope down to the local level and just how you spend your money and those kinds of things, you realize you are shaping the local culture and it's much easier to shape the local culture. So let's talk about this Buckett image, that window Berry, you always like to talk about Wendell Berry whenever we can to we've got a picture of him. You know, she doesn't actually

Speaker 2 [00:23:13] don't have a picture of him now, signed

Speaker 1 [00:23:15] a signed picture glasses,

Speaker 2 [00:23:16] although I do have a letter, a handwritten letter from

Speaker 1 [00:23:19] him. There you go. So let's think about this Buckett imagery, this idea that soil is the chillum kind of of a community is is analogous to good soil where good things can grow. How can we connect the place conversation to soil?

Speaker 2 [00:23:34] Yeah, so first, I think you should reimagine for our listeners what you mean when you talk about the bucket analogy. Can you explain that or they missed episode one? Absolutely.

Speaker 1 [00:23:46] So it's fairly simple. It's Wendell Berry's idea that this bucket that's that he sees on a walk that he takes pretty regularly near his home is the setting for what he calls one of the greatest miracles on earth, and that is the creation of soil, like all the leaves and animal droppings and all kinds of stuff from the environment. Gather in this bucket and then over time they decompose and they turn into soil. Topsoil is so valuable to the well-being of a community and things grow in it and it's hard to make. So he uses that as kind of this analogy for we as humans need to be contributing to the local soil, the local culture, so that that community can be healthy and vibrant in a similar way.

Speaker 2 [00:24:25] OK, love it. So thinking about that and the local soil then and thinking about how certain kinds of things grow better, in particular, soils filled pastures are going to be effective at planting seeds in their local soil. They need to understand the local soil and understand what makes sense to plant there. I'm a big gardener too. And so what I think about two is like when you're planting seeds, you also being aware of the type of soil that you're working with. For example, with carrots. I grow carrots every season, but I know that I actually have three garden plots. Let's be honest. All I do all summer,

Speaker 1 [00:25:03] Wendell Berry and you're listening. I know you're right

Speaker 2 [00:25:06] anyways, but I know that one plot tends to have more clay type soil and you can't really grow carrots very well in clay because clay gets really rock hard and carrots need that room to thin down those roots and grow. And so if I put my carrots there, I'm going to get short, stubby carrots understanding that local soil is really important to knowing what needs to be planted and what will produce well and be fruitful in your environment and in your place.

Speaker 1 [00:25:34] Awesome. This has been a great conversation so far. I'm excited to bring Chris Eleazar from the Ormond Center into this conversation as well, and he's going to give his perspective on the importance of place, local church and how valuing place is part of seeking the shalom to these places.

Speaker 2 [00:26:00] Here we are with Chris Elisara. He is also based out of the Ormond Center at Duke Divinity School. So excited to have Chris with us today. Welcome.

Speaker 1 [00:26:10] It's great to be here and talking about things that I love. And I know that you love to because we've been friends for a while. Yeah. We talk about this when we get together and now we're doing it on this and this podcast. So I'm really glad to be here and talking with you. So, Chris, I know we introduced you in the trailer, but for folks who didn't listen to the trailer, maybe you could tell us briefly a little about who you are and what work you do with the Ormond Center for the Ormond Center. I lead the studio for placemaking. And what that means is we're focusing on trying to help congregations and individuals in those congregations to be a congregation that loves the neighborhood in all its fullness. Obviously, you've taken this position because place is important to you. Could you tell our listeners a little bit what place means to you personally? But why do you care

about place so much? You know, I think when I was listening to what you shared earlier about the way that God put us together, yeah, that really is what resonates with me most deeply contributing to making that place the best it can be, because that's the way that we live together and our identity comes together and it's all shaped by my place. And that's the way that God made us absolutely nowhere. He put us into that garden. He made us to be embodied and to be in place. So, Krista, you work for the Ormond Center, but you're dialing in from a place. Tell us about where you are right now, what place you're in, and tell us a little bit of your personal story in the place. Yeah, I am in the small town of Julian, up in the mountains of San Diego. So, yeah, you don't think about San Diego, Southern California having these mountains, but we're actually on the coast, the crest of a mountain range that that's in Mexico and goes all the way up. And we're here intentionally because we wanted to have a place that we could have a family experience and grow up and that could really shape who they were because, you know, place shapes, identity, kids, your kids were born there. And that's all that's mostly what they have no place, right? Yeah, exactly. So they have been shaped by being in this little small town of Julian. And, you know, at the time we made the decision to come and live here because I studied environmental studies program for Christian university students and we had a program in Belize and a program in New Zealand. And we were running it, which meant that we were there. And then during the summers and the spring break, we were not there. We're back with our friends. And so over a couple of years that just became old and weary, like you described, not rooted in a place. Brutal. Exactly. Exactly. And so we said we wanted to be in a place that was small enough that when we actually left, people would know we had gone and they were looking for us to come back. That's awesome.

Speaker 2 [00:29:16] And if I remember correctly, your family does a fair amount of activities in that town, is that correct?

Speaker 1 [00:29:22] We kind of do, yeah. We play music together. We're a mountain town. Right. So fiddle playing is something that we're doing here in Julian because it's Mountain Town down and mountain music kind of got together. Right. And so there was a bluegrass festival here many years ago, but it kind of stopped. But more recently, different from Dan Amphitheaters. Avery said, hey, let's revive that. And so he started a fiddle contest here and he started fiddle camp. But my son now started to play fiddle. He got on some fiddle. So he's a fiddle player. And because he plays till now, I play guitar and because he was playing fiddle and we were hearing mandolin music, my other son plays mandolin. And so there's a whole thing that's happening up here on these mountain towns of doing around American rock music playing fiddle that feels so Wendell Berry, I got to be honest with you, especially like just that we've been really working this bucket imagery where the bucket is, where local culture is made. It collects all stuff from the region and then turns it into soil. And life can grow out of that. In your picture of making music with your sons and with other folks in the regions, I love it. Let me take it in a little bit of a more somber turn, because I do think you've picked up on something really important, and that is a lot of folks in our country and in the world experience the kind of rootlessness that is that is part and parcel of suburban life, automobile culture, even big city life to some extent. But what you've keyed in on. Is in the rural setting, you can have roots go deeper, but I'm just going to ask you, because you live in I don't. But do you also see in that kind of setting, like the negative side of place where people who aren't from around here aren't as welcome or people are kind of stuck in whatever reputation you have, the kind of parochialism, just not giving people the freedom to be different? I think that's one of the things that the gospel is important for understanding how we react the place, because like you say, the positive side is it can develop a richness of community, the richness of culture. But the gospel always invites people in the stranger in. Yeah, there's always this

hospitality part. And so I think a church and a congregation should be participating in the story making of a particular place in the culture of a place really helping to cultivate the arts and other things that make that place unique and can only be unique because of its geography and its people. The church engages in that, but it also is always hospitable to people. You know, pride of place can get in the way of excluding people. And it can also there's other issues in that regard as well in terms of, you know, overstepping the bounds of excluding people. Yeah, the gospel is not about that. The church is never about that. So I think we try to do both within the framework of understanding the mindset of Jesus in a place

Speaker 2 [00:32:34] thinking about that in terms of the hospitality that you just spoke of. So I'd be curious to you if you have particular examples or things that you encourage churches to consider as they think about how to embody this hospitality.

Speaker 1 [00:32:51] I'll speak again from our experience here in Julian, and that is. I think a church. Needs to be engaged in placemaking by providing events, providing occasions for gathering. And so we do community barbecues and so we bring the community together. We also participate in events like. Small town, Fourth of July parade, yeah, is a big deal, but our church participate in that. And what's happening there is we're being good neighbors, but we're participating in that joint storytelling, that joint story making. So then you can tell a story. Right. And the truth is, I think, you know, that kind of standoffish miss out on the placemaking calling that they have by being standoffish. No, I would say churches need to be really engaged as much as they possibly can in making the the things that happen in a place, the activities, the events, cultivating the arts. Because you've got to be thinking I wonder if part of that hospitality would involve, like translating and interpreting the language and the rhythms to newcomers or outsiders. You mentioned the Fourth of July parade. Actually, in my town in Tacoma, we've got this funny tradition where they do neighborhood Fourth of July parades where literally neighbors just walk in the streets and they decorate their scooters and their bikes. But when we moved here, we moved here in July, about 13 years ago, and we didn't know about that tradition. It was early July and one of our neighbors said, hey, we got this great thing we do on Fourth of July and everybody's included. And tomorrow morning you guys can actually be in a parade. And someone told us that, right? We didn't feel left out. Do you think that's part of how we can help be hospitable with place because place can you know, those rich traditions are the very things that make people feel left out if they don't understand them. I know exactly. I think those things are what we love about a place. And I think what we're doing when we've been hospitable is that we're sharing the love so that others can love as well. So how you make a strong place, I think is growing the love of a place. Right? So visitors come, new people come that they get to love the place and contribute to making the city, the town, the neighborhood as well, because they have grasped. I love what we've done so far and what can you do to add your love to this place and it's going to be maybe a garden out front or it may be another kind of event. But, you know, we do this placemaking because our hearts have expanded in a political type of way. And I think that type of way is actually God loves place. I learned this from another professor at Duke. No one was in a conversation when he said, why is there something about nothing? Because they didn't have to be something. Thank God the Trinity was perfectly happy, but God created and so what we have is a material expression of God's love. This material expression of God's love is something that God has attention towards, loves deeply and wants us to flourish. And so God loves place. That leads me to jump in with a could be totally off script tangent, but because your accent doesn't sound like what I would expect from Julian, California, where did you learn to speak with that beautiful accent? How did the locals there that is, how do they accept that? Well, let's put it this way. If we were exchanging and greeting in my home land, I'd say,

hey, how you doing? Yeah. So I grew up in New Zealand. OK, what part? I grew up in West Auckland, but I was really shaped my identity in New Zealand, also half Samoan. So, you know, New Zealand is a Pacific nation, but it's also a Commonwealth country. So I'm half Polynesian and my mom is European, English, German, French stock. And so I have that quintessential New Zealander and I came to United States and I went to Eastern University and I was twenty two now. And so I've got this funky accent, which is like New Zealand, Philadelphia, East Coast, and I've always loved your accent. So that's who you are.

Speaker 2 [00:37:41] One of the things that, Chris, you talk with aragonite quite a bit about is the built environment, and I would love to hear from you kind of the significance of the built environment and place and how those things intersected together and your biblical understanding of place and how that connects to the built environment of where we live.

Speaker 1 [00:38:04] Yeah, we do, don't we? We're kind of nerdy in that way. Total nerds. We're measuring sidewalks all the time. Yes, we are. Yes, we all drive my kids nuts. But, you know, the built environment is something that I didn't realize how important it was before my friend took off on a road trip along Route 66 and was making a film about that. And as he was driving through town after town, that at one time was vibrant and essential to American commerce and culture. As people were traveling the mother road, that all died and gone away. And so they were derelict pounds. But why? Because something happened in the built environment that changed all that. And that was Interstate Freeway. Yeah, just miles off the main street with interstate freeway. And so that intervention and the built environment changed American culture. And so that kind of cleaving into this how impactful the built environment is. So I think as a Christian going back to the biblical story and going back to that garden story, and we have a responsibility, I think, to have our places be commensurate with the fullness of God's shalom. And that means we have to design well, we have to think through ways that places can be either good or bad and choose to make them the best places they can possibly be for people not to have a story about this. So there is a guy called Henry Turley, and he is a person who grew up in Memphis, and he took a step of love towards his town to say, hey, what can I do to help make that downtown better for the citizens? And so he invested as a developer in downtown Memphis, and he's responsible for bringing that town and city back in lots of different ways by investment in buildings. But here's the real interesting thing. We did a film about him. It wasn't about downtown Memphis, but it was about a place called Harbor Town or Mud Island. So what he did was he developed a community there and he put in housing so people could live there, made it walkable, put in some commerce. It was a beautiful community on that island right across the river. Actually connected by a bridge is a community called Uptown. And uptown is a lower socio economic community. And if you compare the two built environments, they were like night and day, right? A lot of disinvestment in in uptown. But Henry said to himself, hey, you know what? I'm doing an Havertown. The people in town deserve the same type of design, the same type of neighborhood, and so he basically he said, I'm going to do it and I think everybody deserves good design. Yeah, yeah. And it doesn't depend upon who you are, how wealthy you are, what your skin color is, because the built environment that's commensurate or squares up with the best way that I could be for a community, that's what we should be doing. And churches can contribute to that. Yeah. So built environment as a way of loving your neighbor as contributing to Siloam. Great example. So if I could ask you the follow up question to that, you know, the old saw that sometimes gets thrown around in Christian circles. The church is not the building, it's the people. We sort of create this dichotomy between place and people. And so since we're on the subject of place, do you think someone has to choose between loving the people or loving the place? How do you think

about that? We can't separate the two. The love of people means you have to love the place as well, and you need to contribute to making that place the best it can be. That means for a church to actually have eyes on the place, to see the place and its strengths and weaknesses and where there is no weaknesses or gaps in that place. I think the church should start to contribute to solving those gaps. So some of those problems that could be contributing housing, there is things that we can do at the church to love people. Through loving place, you know, that you're loved by your community when a community is investing in the built environment and investing in the community and the place that you're living in. And my kids know that they're loved because of the intentional way that we have saved some places, for example, in July, and we save a natural place so that they could experience it. We actually saved a park downtown that was actually going away. We saved that place because it was the only public park. If that park wasn't there. The kids in our community would not feel as loved. As if that park had gone, I

Speaker 2 [00:43:31] think it brings dignity to people, to as you love a place and you keep up a place and you maintain a place, you're also conveying to people that. You are worthy of a place that is good, you

Speaker 1 [00:43:46] know, there are some designers and landscape architects that understand this. And so when they designed a public space. What they're trying to do. Is there trying to make the the public space as beautiful as it possibly can be? And designed in such a way that could uplift your spirit in that public space, because you know that space can give you dignity. Yeah. Mm hmm. And anybody can be in that public space. Yeah. That's the responsibility of a public designer.

Speaker 2 [00:44:28] And I think it's a good challenge to churches to to think about their property as public space in many ways and what are ways that they can creatively invite public to enjoy their property in a similar way.

Speaker 1 [00:44:43] I got to jump in, though, because because you were talking about Memphis and you said we also made a film in Memphis. And then I was like also made a film. I bet our listeners don't even know that you make films.

Speaker 2 [00:44:54] So guess as a filmmaker on the.

Speaker 1 [00:44:56] We didn't even mention that. Can you just tell us real briefly what films you make and why? We we specialize in making films about cities, towns and places. The company is first to making films and we also do a film festival. And the film festival is called The Better City's Film Festival. So we try to do in our own films and in the film festival is really tell stories and collect stories that can inspire people to make great places. And telling stories is exactly what Wendell Berry says is that's his analog for the bucket is when we gather and tell stories where we're making local culture, we're making soil. Man you're getting the Wendell Berry seal of excellence right now between the music on the.

Speaker 2 [00:45:41] Which is the determiner. That's a

Speaker 1 [00:45:44] vowel. Yes. I think wants to marry Wendell Berry. But that's another story. That's another story. Can I say something about this a little bit, too, as well? Yeah. Yeah. You know, the story stuff we say tomorrow is a story can change a city. Yeah. And how did it do that? I mean, there's some empirical work that's been done that a healthy adult, resilient adult. Is resilient and healthy, in part because they have been told in their family over and over and over again family stories, so the stories that people are told as

young kids over and over and a government that has an impact on an individual's identity, the mental health, the mental well-being, the spiritual being, and become Brazilian adults. And James and Barbara Fellows that a recent book, *Altun*. I just bought that book. I just got it. Yeah, you'll love it. And they went all around the country. One hundred thousand miles. Right. And they were asking questions. What makes a town resilient that has kind of fallen on hard times but is bouncing back. And they say one of the important things in the top 10 is that town has a civic story and that town is working this epic story. They know where they came from. And they don't try to sugarcoat that story in the past and they're in a moment right now that they're thinking through and working their story and they got a future path of the story they want to create. But the citizens in those towns are a part of a civic story. I think it's true both at an individual level, but also in terms of the civic story for towns, communities, neighborhoods and congregations participating in shaping the civic story for the individuals and citizens. And I think that's something we should be doing.

Speaker 2 [00:47:45] I love it. Yeah, that's beautiful. I was curious because you had made mention that you have some stories with your own family. I don't know if you want to share any of those.

Speaker 1 [00:47:57] Yeah, there's a story about. The impact took place and how place shapes our identity. We live in Jolin, as I mentioned, we're in the mountains, but we look at a mountain in particular called Vulcano. And Boeken Mountain is so present in our town, everybody sees it. And my son, being our New Zealander, he is connecting both his American identity and his New Zealand identity. And in New Zealand, the way that the Maori people in New Zealand talk about themselves and talk about their identity is always connected to place. So when you introduce yourself, as in New Zealand Maori person, you always will start with a geographical feature. And they say, I am such and such and such and such as my mountain. And so coming back to join right is my son understanding and learning about this and seeing Volkert Mountain. It's become a place that he loves and his identity is actually inseparable from this mountain. He just loves it. Right. And so now he identifies himself as Ethan. And Bokan is my mountain. That's awesome. And he is a part of the story that is here. You can't separate his identity from Julian. Oh, my gosh. That's awesome. I love that chills.

Speaker 2 [00:49:26] Thank you for sharing that story with us.

Speaker 1 [00:49:27] Can I say one more thing? Yeah, please do. I don't want the listeners to come away thinking they have to live in a small town like Julian. I love a place. That's what we do and that's how we've done it. But you don't have to leave and go to small town because you can think of a city. What's the city? The city is actually an aggregation of small towns. And so the thing that we have here. And Julian. You can have in a city you can have anywhere, because a real well designed city is basically an aggregation of small towns with a heart in the core and a main street and then all the other stuff around. And so you can love your neighborhood, your five minute walk, your 10 minute walk in any place. Right. To give it that attention. Definitely, and give it that love.

Speaker 2 [00:50:20] And I think that's OK. Give it that attention. No, it's there. I love

Speaker 1 [00:50:23] it. Awesome. Awesome. Hi, folks, this is Chris Elisara, again, sharing the Ormond. I was especially happy when we talked in this episode about the powerful relationship between hospitality in place, because that's what I've been chewing on recently after hosting a group of people on the property here in Julian. And as we prepare to host our guests, several things hit home. Hospitality is thoughtfully and intentionally

sharing your love of a place with your guests so they, too, can experience and enjoy it as you do. Through your hospitality, your guest gets to love your garden or your farmer's market or your favorite coffee shop, the view from your porch or some musicians in your daily life. But this all supposes that you're well acquainted and deeply love the particularities of where you live. And that's the point that hit me as we prepared for our guests. As we get ready for their arrival, we started to see a place with new eyes, we appreciated the obvious, beautiful and good things, but we also saw what was not so good and needed our attention to bring up to speed what needed maintenance and repair. And we set about repairing, painting and improving. To be as hospitable as you possibly could be got deeper and deeper into the particularities of our place. We showed off and enjoyed the good and we repaired the bad. And when the day arrived, everyone really loved dwelling with our community and enjoying our place. So my thought is this if you really want to experience and understand with the heart and soul of what places, what place means, how vital place is to our identity, the way we as Christians, pastors and congregations should pay special attention to place. Focus on sharpening your hospitality game because hospitality is a great teacher about place. In fact, try this thought experiment. If you knew Jesus was coming to be a guest in your church, in your neighborhood, your town or in your home, what would you introduce him to? What would you want him to experience at your church as a place? What would you want him to experience in your neighborhood? Thinking through these details will drive you to learn a ton about place and your place in particular. Maybe it will lead to some place making ideas and projects with your neighbors. That's it for now. Thanks for listening.

Speaker 2 [00:53:11] Thanks for tuning in to another episode of the embedded church podcast. Be sure to check out the episode show notes for links to resources and other helpful information related to this episode. If you'd like to connect with us to share comments or ideas about the work we're doing. We'd love to hear from you. You can send us an email at info@embeddedchurch.com or leave a voice message on our feedback line by dialing seven six zero five to seven three to six zero followers on Instagram Embedded Church podcast or visit our website www.thatembeddedchurch.com. Finally, thank you to our Stephen for partners at Ormond Center and to all of our faithful listeners and supporters who have helped us make it to Season four, we are honored and encouraged until next time. Be well.