

Season 4 Episode 6 Rob Kaple Final

Speaker 1 [00:00:00] There's an opportunity for us to end our property, to be a part of a story being told in the city at this time and for way for us to communicate something to visually to the people around us, that there's care, there's intentionality. We use the phrase throughout the whole building project. The building preaches. 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 [00:00:39] 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 [00:00:52] I'm Eric Jacobsen.

Speaker 2 [00:00:54] And I'm Sarah Joyce and will be your host on today's episode of the

Speaker 3 [00:00:58] Embedded Church podcast. Hey, we are on Episode six at this point, and we have brought in Rob Caple to talk more specifically about placemaking that's the term we want to unpack on the street today.

Speaker 1 [00:01:17] Yeah, and I know you're not supposed to have a favorite, but I got to admit, this is one of my favorite episodes that we've done. Yeah, yeah. What I love about this is Rob's a great pastor, from what I can tell, and I really resonate with him as a pastor. But what I think is particularly exciting, given the goals of our podcast and even this season is my guess is three years ago, Rob didn't have any concept of what placemaking meant that wasn't in his mental architecture, but because of the context that we're God led them as a church and him as a leader, they all got engaged in really significant placemaking with their church facility and repurposing that space. And it was really exciting to see a light bulb almost going on in his mind and kind of represent his congregation about how that could really be a key factor in their mission effectiveness. So I think it's a great example of the potential of placemaking for a church.

Speaker 3 [00:02:08] I also think that it was fun to watch you totally geek out on the fact that Rob was speaking to things like designing parking lots that are in back of the building and bringing buildings up to the sidewalk and all of those types of things that make for an embedded church, though, even though he maybe didn't say embedded church specifically, he definitely speaks to some of the design factors that Eric is always geeking out about. So those here

Speaker 1 [00:02:35] absolutely are not just the church, right? I mean, that's the whole thing is sometimes when we talked about. Church and buildings, we really get stuck on just church and buildings, but we got into the neighborhood and we talked about how their church is located between two neighborhoods, one that's wealthy and one that's really disinvested and the differences, ones on the wrong side of the tracks. And we got to talk about these border vacuums that Jane Jacobs illustrates in death and life and how that really can have a negative impact on the neighborhood and how the Beltline is helping to reconnect the neighborhoods and hopefully bring some justice and some equity back into these neighborhoods. So it was an exciting episode all around.

Speaker 3 [00:03:10] Yeah. And how their property is at the intersection of all these various factors happening in the city of Atlanta right now. And so I think was really cool to see if they actually were cognizant of that and took these, what we say, existing materials. So the Beltline, their location, the existing buildings that they had on the property, rather than knocking them down, they actually made new use of them. And they really repurposed these things into something that's beautiful, that's created this beautiful place. And I think that also speaks to the Wendell Berry bucket we've been talking about, but also the compost heap really taking that active approach to the materials that are in your spheres and actively mixing them together and turning them over to create that new soil. So I think he did a good job of doing that, too. So maybe Eric, maybe he is the poster child for the embedded church podcast topic.

Speaker 1 [00:04:06] So let's let's get him on it. I'm excited to share with you guys. We are excited to be here with Rob Caple from Grace Midtown in Atlanta. Rob, thanks so much for being with us today. Yeah, excited to be here.

Speaker 3 [00:04:27] Welcome.

Speaker 1 [00:04:27] So you are now with Grace Midtown, but Grace is a family of churches. I understand if you've been in the family for a long time, you're so. Family of churches started as one church in the suburbs of Atlanta 30 something years ago, planted Grace Midtown Church around 2005. And then in the years following, we graced Midtown, helped plant a few churches. A few others were planted out of that church in the suburbs. And it's this family approach kind of blossomed as we sort of just figured out what we were doing through the years and we knew we didn't want to do a multisite model just wasn't us. We knew we weren't trying to form a denomination.

Speaker 3 [00:05:10] That sounds really interesting. I'd be curious. So how would you describe the mission or the DNA of that Grace Church family that you discussed?

Speaker 1 [00:05:19] The mission of the Grace Family Church is actually really clear, it's to produce a movement of healthy churches that plant churches that raise up next generation leaders and that catalyze movement in the Muslim world so that those three pillars of the history of the of our family churches and then each local church has its own mission, its own vision, but is still committed to the shared mission that we have together.

Speaker 3 [00:05:48] One of those things was the healthy churches. That right. Yeah. Can you put some definition to what you mean by healthy?

Speaker 1 [00:05:57] Yeah, I mean, that was an important word for us, as we've sort of articulated that mission and vision in the process of even articulating it's been the the lead pastors of those various churches really putting our heads together with along with the team, and that healthy things were really important because we have been a pretty move mental thing for as long as we've existed, especially over the past decade. And we've seen a lot of people burn out, crash and burn. Just because something is growing and expanding doesn't make it healthy. I think personally, for a lot of our leaders, the journey of emotional health, physical health, mental health, all that stuff has been really, really important. Whereas maybe as younger leaders, we could have just thought through the lens of spiritual and growth or whatever, taking ground. We just want to build something that's going to last that's possible for our listeners who aren't able to see what's going on. Rob looks really relaxed right now after a week of Church Sabbath, which was such a brilliant idea. And maybe we'll throw something about that on our show notes, because I

think it's a really great idea for health. But let me just follow up on Saraj questions. Midtown is a distinct church within the family. You guys have a distinct mission that you guys are called to a different a distinct DNA. So, yeah. And so even just for clarity, part of our kind of the family model, if you will, that we've chosen and that we're kind of building out is there's a lot of autonomy at that local level. So each church has its own vision, mission values. And so for us, our mission statement is together, inviting all humans to become awake to God. And that language is really intentional for us. A wake to God stuff has been so resonant for years with us, Your Grace, Midtown. What I love about it is it's not just a one time thing where Saul becomes Paul when he has this awakening moment, but it's like I am becoming awake to God as the lead pastor still in my life. And it really is something that we believe there's moments in the process and and each of those parts are really important together. It's not something that just the church staff is doing all humans. It's like all kinds of people. Why not say people like humans? That's a weird word. I mean, we just feel like it's dignifying language, actually, for humanity. And so every type of background and that becoming is an important part of the process. So together inviting all humans to become awake to God, I love it. Cool.

Speaker 3 [00:08:30] But that reminds me of is working out your continue to work out your salvation, right. Yeah. It's not a one time event. It's a continuous working outworking of so many things. Yeah, that's awesome. Tell us a little bit more about the Grace Midtown location. We're going to dig into your current location, but have you always been where you currently are? Can you tell us a little bit about that evolution or that journey?

Speaker 1 [00:08:54] Yep. So our church started sometime around 2005 and it kind of began as a ministry in the city. But our church started meeting at what was originally West Miraz Baptist Church in Home Park, Atlanta, which is right in the middle of Georgia Tech campus. There's like a little residential neighborhood called Home Park. It's just a bunch of these little houses and duplexes and quadruplets is this little brick church building with a steeple in the middle of Georgia Tech campus became Grace Midtown Church. It was originally part of the strategy for that location was it's really close to this huge mosque. And so there was a thought of like, what's what's God we could be doing here? And so there was some really cool stuff that was taking place in relationship with Muslim people. But then what they found I was around these days was it became this like boom in college ministry. Matt Reynolds, who was the college pastor at Grace Fellowship Church at the time, came in and became the lead pastor. And he and his wife, Margaret, moved to the city and they called a bunch of their friends to come work with them and really started a thing that quickly kind of exploded. That was the first location. And then in 2012, they started looking around and saying, what's next? How do we we can't sustain this? And found our current property, which was just down the road about a little over a mile south west. We're on for context. If anyone knows Atlanta, we're on Northside Drive and where there's a little street called Travis Street that connects Northside Drive in North Avenue, just up the road from the Mercedes Benz Stadium. And it borders basically the booming kind of high rise west midtown area to the east and on the west side that we have English Avenue, which is historically one of the most under-resourced neighborhoods in the city in all of Atlanta history. There is, I guess the Olympics came in. Ninety six in basically all the entire neighborhoods got nicer as a bunch of funds got pumped in. Yeah, except for two neighborhoods that got. Not as nice, and it became known as the largest open air heroin market in the country. It went through a period of just a lot of challenges. And I don't think we really knew we were getting into as a church when we decided to make the jump to come over here.

Speaker 3 [00:11:15] Are there physical barriers that kind of orphaned these areas in that way, or is there ways that that is explained totally?

Speaker 1 [00:11:22] Yeah, I mean, so you've got the old railroad system that marked out a lot of what you see in the city. And so we'll get to this, I'm sure. But we have this belt line that is a walking biking trail is a big project of the city that is built out on an old railroad line and it runs right up along our property. And so it's literally like. The wrong size right here know you've got this border. There are other borders, there's the history of redlining and all that stuff that you see systemic stuff through the history of our country, especially in Atlanta, that contributed to certain neighborhoods being under-resourced for a number of years. And there's lots of neighborhoods where highways went through. Freeways did all kinds, right?

Speaker 3 [00:12:04] Yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:12:05] Jane Jacobs talked about border vacuum's is a big problem for some of the neighborhoods that got on the wrong side of whatever border it was. And then there's also this really beautiful history of headquarters of a lot of the civil rights movement in English Avenue, Vine City. Dr. King, his historic home was in the area. So there's a lot of nuance to the area and a lot of pain and then a lot of beauty and then a lot of it the same time. Now a ton of development. And we know all the stuff that comes with that. The good and the bad in the world is that it can go really badly for people who don't have the ability to pay higher rent or more taxes or any that kind of stuff. What about the folks who you've gathered for to be part of your community? Where do they live? Are they some around the neighborhood or are they kind of scattered pretty far? It's been different through different seasons in the life of the church. We started as this kind of college ministry and a lot of the core people in the church were young adults, young professionals, young married couples, people maybe buying their first home. And so it's almost like the life stages of the church have grown sort of with the leadership of the church. We still have a ton of college students, still lots of young people that have been in town since 2013. So when I came on staff and we moved into our neighborhood, just kind of found the only house we could find, you know, just just get in there. And then I think we probably the last that was the last house that we would have been able to afford in that neighborhood, you know, to see how things have become as of so much so much development and so many so much demand for housing in the city. I think if we're honest, we are a commuter church. I mean, there are people who drive in from all over the place. Atlanta is a city. You've ever been to Atlanta, though. It's a sprawling city. That's the word people used to describe it sprawl. One of the guys that we read, James Howard Kunstler, he's one of the authors that we sat around in this podcast. He's got a great description of Atlanta. It's not super charitable. He calls it something like a great big hairball of a mess. That sounds right. One of our board members is in city planning. And so he was a huge part of this building project. So we've been privy to all sorts of conversations around and what cities were really, like planned. Well, and you go businessmen and see how they developed it this way. And with Atlanta, I mean, I think the people doing city planning have had their hands full because they're trying to just make do with the roads and arteries and stuff that didn't have a lot of rhyme or reason to start out with. It just sort of kept going. And so now you've got this huge metro area. It's like it never ends. But right in the city, there's sort of this phrase like your step outside the perimeter, inside the perimeter, because we've got this to a perimeter that is sort of a border. You know, Atlanta's even tighter than that. So it's just it's big and hairy and it's a hairball like.

Speaker 3 [00:15:01] Well, bringing it back down to the local neighborhood scale, then, yeah, I'd be curious to hear you talked about the neighborhood where the church is located, is having a painful history. Be beautiful in many ways. And there are so many places in our world that are like that. So I'd be curious to hear from you. What do you think pleases God about the neighborhood better? And when you look around, what do you feel like really brings glory to who he is or is kind of the redeeming parts?

Speaker 1 [00:15:29] Yeah, I mean, people, right? I think humans are what it's all about. And that's, I think, what God's heart is about in the neighborhood. As I was mentioning, it's changing before our very eyes. The Beltline development that's come in brings with it a whole lot of other development. So we've got the largest mixed use development site in the city. Happening right now is a stone's throw from our church within the neighborhood of English Avenue. So it's going to be shopping, living like that work, play, live kind of thing. It's it's huge. And it's going to bring with it a largely different demographic than a lot of people who've lived in the neighborhood. And, um, and so I think we've tried to be really intentional as a team and as a church to go, hey, how can we be for everybody that's around us? And that means how do we serve in dignifying ways, people who have been under-resourced and actually need the love for someone in the circumstances, like help help me change some of my life circumstances or survive. And then for others, what's the good news for the person who's going to move into one of these High-Rise Lofts and just a few months and be a Beltline walk? George Church? I think he loves people and I think he's pleased with attempts to do good as well as we've had a lot of humbling experience as the years of trying to do good, but then realizing we were doing harm, you know, as a predominantly white church, still predominantly white. I mean, we've grown in diversity and have a heart and a desire and a plan to continue to do that, but also recognizing that is a thing. And so early on and so getting onto this property started going through some deep soul searching and soul frustrating processes of figuring out how do you serve with dignity, how do you help in ways that don't cause harm. And so there are all kinds of helpful curriculums and stuff that we trainings that we went through and continue to do. But we have gotten it wrong where we've gotten it right. Probably. I love I love the fact you say that because I think that's true of so many.

Speaker 3 [00:17:41] Can you give a couple examples of key nuggets that you've really taken to heart?

Speaker 1 [00:17:46] Yeah, so there's this curriculum called Dignity Serb's that we we use and they may have rebranded to serving with dignity. We took our staff through it years ago, actually in 2013 when I came on staff. And we still use it as a training locally. And some of the the the nuggets from that are that every person has something to offer. Every person has assets. And so sometimes there can be this toxic way of approaching helping where churches try to be the hero and view themselves as the one with all the assets that's helping the person that doesn't have anything to offer but to actually recognize that every every person has something to offer the collective whole. And you dignify people when you relate to them as whole human beings and not as just someone defined by their needs or your perception of their needs. So that that idea of everyone possessing assets or having something to offer is big. And then another kind of nugget from that training that I think is a really great challenge is the idea that people are more important than change, which as someone who gets excited about change and progress and development and moving forward, I took as a real personal challenge when I first heard that idea and still challenged by it, that people are more important than change. Yeah, not treating people's projects like really dignifying who they are. That's powerful. Let's talk about the the property that you guys moved into. So 2012 got into the property. It's it was a demolition

company originally. So there's these three buildings on the property, one real big warehouse, one medium sized warehouse and one smaller building. That's like an office space or something before. And so we got in and twenty twelve and renovated that smaller warehouse, the medium sized building. So that was a big project. I mean purchasing the property and then renovating that, it was just a big empty building and that's where the church gatherings, events, all stuff existed from twenty twelve until twenty nineteen. That was like Sunday gatherings by. Event, and it was just a big open building, bathrooms were in a different was so everything about our property has been so inconvenient to the years like this. If you need to use the restroom, you have to walk through the rain to get to another building because the larger warehouse had our cafe and kind of lobby space in a parking is all broken up still in different places. It was kind of a joke for years. It was like you got to be bold to even come to church here just to find your way. There's a lot of hurdles to get over and I think we maybe even kind of bragged about it for years of like, OK, you got to really want it. So if you're here, congrats. You know, let's do something. It's good. It's good for discipleship. Not all here it is. And it's great for that sort of start up. Grady Church planting as we've grown, we've really wanted to to find ways to practice hospitality in practical ways with our space. And so I'm happy that we're not just the way we were at the time. Then the biggest building on the property is this big, empty warehouse that we were told in twenty thirteen. We couldn't ever renovate that building because it was like off plum or something. And so we just rolled it out like OK, yeah, I guess we got to tear down or build something else somewhere else when it comes time to go to the next stage. And so we just parked cars in it, which we weren't even supposed to be doing that. We also utilized it some for we partnered with an organization here in the neighborhood. There was a bike shop that helped local kids build and repair bikes and they like earned a bike for themselves. It's a pretty cool thing. They still operate in another part of the neighborhood, but for a long time we were like their bike depot because it just a lot of square footage, a lot of bikes could be stored. And so we had like hundreds of bicycles in our warehouse at any given moment to. So I think we have a somewhat clearer picture why you felt you needed to make some changes to that property. I think the what became clear to us was we have this incredible resource. Yeah. In the even just the acreage in the middle of the city. My gosh. I mean, we were able to buy that the property at a moment where it would not go for that today. So even recognizing what an incredible opportunity to steward and we're not stewarding this well if we don't activate it and maximize it. And so that that even became something that energized us. So we can't just let this sit here as, you know, something that has all this latent potential that's not being you.

Speaker 3 [00:22:33] We talk a lot on this podcast about placemaking, and I feel like you are awakened to this idea. We need to make a place here. You've already been slowly developing that idea, but then really coming into that and its full fruition years down the road. Talk to us a little bit about the process for getting to the remodel and what that looked like

Speaker 1 [00:22:54] in fall of twenty seventeen. And really for the few years leading up to it, we had some various conversations in church wide meetings where we would do these dream nights. So we had some of those dream nights through the years where we'd meet God. What are you doing? What's what's in the hearts of our people. But we still weren't thinking of that warehouse as an option, really. And so we brought in an architecture firm who was highly recommended by our friend and board member, who is a city planner, Nathan Galantine. Give him a shout out. He knew about Kromberg Wall. And so we met up with them. And they did a great job of really just listening to getting to know us, our culture, our vision, our heart, got to know our property a little bit. And then they started sort

of pitching some ideas for what was possible. They said, hey, we could build something brand new up on this hill facing Northside Drive, which is to remind you, facing towards the sort of affluent development of west midtown. And if you go up in Riverside Drive, keep driving north from Mercedes Benz Stadium all the way up, you'll see lots of really cool, nice buildings facing the street. And they were even staying in the suburbs. If you go to a church or to a Wal-Mart, it's going to be parking lot out front and then building way in the back of many cars right there. And the people come into the building. But in the city, you see more of these new buildings on the street right there. And then you drive around back to park, but you've got sort of the front door facing the street facing where all that we call that an embedded church. And that's kind of behind the name of our podcast that you are describing it perfectly. There we go. I mean, we had good architects that were teaching us about this stuff. And so they said, you know, this is how we recommend if you were going to do it. And we got kind of excited. It's kind of a sexy idea. All right. We've got to do a big new building. And it sounded really, really cool. We brought the idea to the church in. A lot of people said, I don't know. I mean, is that us? Are we the big, shiny new thing like that is like something about the culture didn't resonate. There was a sentiment of and is there not another option? Is there not like a secret option C? Because the other option was there's a building across the street that was a little smaller, like we could buy that and maybe use that as a training space. So we went back to the architects, got a second opinion on that old warehouse and found out actually the first opinion was incorrect. We could actually renovate it. Nice. Yeah, that began a process of really dreaming into rather than. Building something new, which is fine, there's nothing wrong with that, is part of who we are as a church. Does the idea of repurposing something old sound more like us and even the story that gods want to tell through us to our context that something can be repurposed, rebuilt, redeemed? Yeah. And one quick note, too, was the shiny new building would have been facing Northside Drive, facing Midtown, facing all the affluence and development innovation. I mean, you're talking about massive universities, corporate headquarters, Coca-Cola headquarters. There's a lot happening there, right? Or is there even something about our deciding to make our front door face English Avenue to this neighborhood that's on the other side of the tracks? Not because we're choosing one or over the other, but there is something that even felt right about that. And I think when we started to consider that secret option C, there was just something kind of like settled over the community. And and I think we all knew, like, this is this is what we have to do. And it just so happened that the Beltline came right by your front door and then your location. I think that's pretty awesome. So that's the crazy irony. And kind of best of both worlds, I guess we could have chosen to have our front door facing the main road, if you will. But actually the Beltline, which I would encourage listeners to Google Atlanta Beltline project with the Beltline announced as we were finishing construction, announced that there will side connector trail, which is a spur of the Beltline that runs from the main Beltline to Bean Stadium, would run literally through our parking lot. There was a piece of our parking lot so we'd give up some of our parking lot that we didn't own. It runs literally right up to our front door and right up to really the most beautiful part of our property, which is our courtyard, and going into the main gathering space, which has these big glass windows and big glass garage doors that open up. It's just a really special thing that that that's the thing that passerby's get to see, actually. I love how you're embedded, but you are embedded on a different side of the initial proposal.

Speaker 3 [00:27:57] So how is the new property working out for you all these days?

Speaker 1 [00:28:00] Well, we moved in in June of twenty nineteen and so we had about seven, eight months of a party in there. You know, we did our Sunday gatherings. We've had some big worship nights, house fires, a worship expression. It's kind of based out of

our church. And so we did some big house first worship nights in there and then pandemic hit the spring of twenty twenty. And we were you know, I was there's there's a picture when we tell the story for like people who are new to the church, like, hey, here's the sort of the chapters in the life of the church up to now when we tell the story of how we got into this property and this whole thing happened and there's a picture of me standing alone in the room on the stage talking to a camera the first week of the pandemic. And so that was the time for us to kind of double down and say, hey, are we really going to be about church? It's about empowering people to do in their homes, to be the body of Christ in their homes and neighborhoods. And so that became kind of an area of focus for us.

Speaker 3 [00:29:13] Your architect won a merit award for this design and many of our listeners probably aren't familiar with this, but there's the Congress for the New Urbanism, which we referenced on this podcast a fair amount, and they have annual design awards every year. And your architect actually won a merit award through the Congress for the New Urbanism, which is a pretty big deal in our world of nerdy New Urbanist.

Speaker 1 [00:29:39] And I are members of the Congress. Oh, cool. That's that's part of our interest here.

Speaker 3 [00:29:45] So were you surprised by this or did you know that this was even going to be up for an award? How did you learn about this whole thing?

Speaker 1 [00:29:52] I didn't know the Congress for New Urbanism was the thing that was dealt. So that's fine. But we're

Speaker 3 [00:29:58] oddballs. Welcome to our geeky world.

Speaker 1 [00:30:01] I mean, it's a cool world. I like it. So we heard they told us they reached out to some of the folks that had been there, touch point on the project. And that board member of ours that works in city planning expressed how big of a deal it was. And of course, we just found out, I don't know, a month ago, a couple of months ago that that was happening. So I would say. It's surprising to me in that I wouldn't I mean, I'm like, we're church, right? I mean, there's so much really awesome development stuff happening in the city. I wouldn't have known about these bodies issuing awards, but I didn't I wouldn't have known that we were on the radar necessarily. So that surprises me. But it doesn't surprise me because of the actual quality of the space. I mean, it's beautiful. And I have just been blown away by the architects. Their design was great. They worked with us so thoroughly. There was never a moment of them trying to impose the vision in their heads. They knew what they were doing. Their values and our values really synched up. And I think they did a great job of finding out who we are. We chose them to because we like their portfolio. The work they've done was awesome already. And so we're like, man, if you make this look anything close to that, this is going to be awesome. And I would say to that our our construction team did a great job of executing the plans. I mean, our first day and people were going, this looks like the renderings. I'm shocked. Like, I don't know I don't know if we just expect something to not be quite as good as you hoped or would be a little. So if I could jump in a little bit, just this might be helpful for some of our listeners and such. But like when you think about an award that might be like an architectural word, a lot of architectural awards are given for what I would say as buildings, as sculptures. It looks cool on a postcard like Disney Hall in Los Angeles. It looks really cool and funky. And it's interesting visually with the award that you guys got the merit thing for was about urbanism, not architecture. And it was for the category of the street, the block in the building. What I think what they were trying to recognize is kind of what you were talking

about earlier. A lot of suburban churches set back surrounded by a parking lot. They're really cut off from the neighborhood. So not only did your architect encourage you to be kind of closer to and connected to the neighborhood, but put some design elements in that connected to the street grid, and you did a really good example of placemaking. You made your neighborhood better by what you guys did. At least that's what I think with the awards trying to get at. So maybe if we could talk a little bit about some of that, like, I guess you got garage doors that open up and a lot of access in and out the way you guys handle parking. We talked already about the bike path. Can you talk about some of the elements that you think may have contributed to that recognition? Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that a big part of it is that the Beltline path, some of the photos that have even been released publicly or on the Beltline website, you can walk down the Beltline, which is public, and take photos of the front of our property and get the the wow factor, actually, which once we found out we'd already had the plans to to orient the space this week. It's just that's the way the building was already. We were repurposing an old existing building. But once we found out about the Beltline coming through, our architects already had a great relationship with the Beltline team. Once they found out, they were able to really relate well and tie in stuff in the right way. So we've got two actual like Beltline type in entries from our property. It makes sense. It actually looks like there was a holistic plan between our property and the development of the Beltline. We had to give up, but we were going to have a car drop off area and even like a fire lane that had to get. So there was stuff that had to get totally redrawn, redone, won some of the beltline coming in. I think that

Speaker 3 [00:34:04] shows like a willingness on yours and to look outside your four walls and how you're connected to that beltline, because I know a lot of churches who really want that drop lane, no matter what I mean is that even that you're willing to forgo that because you recognize, oh, there's this connection that could be made if we reorients that drop off lane in a different way or take it away. You know, and that's a very valuable thing, I think, to be thinking more broadly about how you're connected with the broader neighborhood in that way.

Speaker 1 [00:34:33] Yeah. And so we actually the fireline is now we had to we had to reinforce the the Beltline in front of us so that a fire truck, if necessary, can pull onto the Beltline to access our our property. So there was this a lot that had to happen there. But you're right. I mean, it it felt like we won the lottery. Honestly, when we found out about the Beltline, the way the architects told us, they said, hey, this is like the closest thing to waterfront property that Atlanta has. But for us, even the vision of the Beltline is about. Connecting people, connecting neighborhoods and even this idea of social capital and which is a big deal for us. And so the idea that our property could be integrated right into this pathway of connection and to know that, of course, like there's going to be challenges for the neighborhood earlier parts of the Beltline where there is so much gentrification, they had to rethink the way they did everything on the rest of the Beltline. So there's just a whole lanas, you know, there's a lot of great minds there. There's a lot of money. There's a lot of different things taking place. But for us to go, there's there's an opportunity for us to find our property, to be a part of a story that's being told in the city at this time in for way for us to communicate something to visually to the people around us, that there's care, there's intentionality. We use the phrase throughout the whole building project. The building preaches the building bridges, which is a very historically kind of not Protestant way of thinking, a church way of get the big box store people in there and God goes with you when you go home. So it doesn't matter for us. We're like, that's true. And we want the space to communicate something. And for there to be a sacredness to that space, it speaks to anyone in the area that's walking down the beltline, walking to this neighborhood, driving by. You see it and they go, what is that? And hopefully it

communicates something special to Rob. I think you're on to something. I think I was excited about the Beltline project for I think I've known about it for like a decade or something. And it really is an attempt it was an attempt to undo some of the prior injustices and the housing stuff and the cul de sacs and some of the exclusionary zoning and whatnot really had a lot of strong racial implications, really meant banishing strangers from going through neighborhoods and things like that line has really and obviously these are hard things to manage gentrification. But the attempt there is to connect neighborhoods that that got cut off and connect people. And I think it's a beautiful vision. So I think it's kind of cool that it happened to just show up at your front door as you guys were praying about doing some of that same work. So I see a lot of alignment between those two ideas. Yeah, it's amazing. I mean, I still can't believe that it happened when it did in the way it did. And can I ask about resources like who have you been reading or who you've been listening to that's helped you get to be who you are, who shaped you? Yeah, I got to go back a little bit, I think, in the in the mental library. But I mean, a lot of likes of Tim Keller's stuff about the city has been deeply influential for us as a church years into the past. His books center church. It's like a textbook, you know. Right. That we've studied as a staff. We studied it. Thank you so much for spending some time with us. Really, really great conversation. I'm excited to get this one out and get our listeners to find out more about your story. It's awesome. Sure. Thank you, Eric. Here, Joy is great. It was an honor to be on the podcast with you.

Speaker 3 [00:38:19] Absolutely. Thank you.

Speaker 1 [00:38:29] I can see in my mind's eye pastors listening to this episode, nodding and smiling, knowing smiles, recognizing the challenges, questions and joys that Rob is talking about, Rob shares a lot of wisdom from a pastor's perspective that I know is going to be very helpful to many listeners is one thing that sticks out to me that I want to briefly pick up on, and that is the relationship between the church and the professional architects, designers and builders who are joining together to make it beautiful and functional. Building for the church community and through its design, intentionally contributes positively to the public realm as well. In other words, there are an intense design process undertaken by the church and the professional designers. A place was designed that embody the church's values, history, vision and needs. But that was not the only consideration. As a property and building owner, the church also took into consideration its role within the urban fabric and its responsibility to the public realm. So in the end, the design of the renovation served the church fabulously. But it also added something special to the public space that is a blessing to the community to. Great job, Grace, Midtown, great job, Kronenburg Wall now called Kronenburg Urbanist and Architects. So how do pastors find such skilled urbanist architects and designers when they need them? That's always going to be a challenge. We're not there yet, but one of the helpful services the placemaking studio at the Ormond Center is planning to do is to help churches find such talent. We'll be working with our partners, like the Seeing You Christian Caucus, an association of Christians who are architects, urban designers, developers, builders, et cetera, who are experts like Grace's partners, organizations like Ampara, the United Church of Christ Building and Loan Fund, and, of course, the talented Sarah. To create a directory that can help churches design, build and renovate church property in placemaking ways that serve both congregations and make a positive contribution to the public realm and public good. Look, Mark, the Ormond Center's placemaking studio and check in on our progress towards that goal. Thanks for listening.

Speaker 2 [00:41:00] 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 Bewell.