

Town Hall Discussion

A THEOLOGY OF PLACE

NOV 6, 2020

Outline of our Evening

- 7:00pm Welcome & Why
 - 7:05pm Review: What is a theology of place?
 - 7:15pm New: Some biblical passages and some practical examples
 - 7:25pm Prayer
 - 7:30pm Discussion
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Why are we talking about theology of place?

- a community member asked to rent our building
 - we believe that to love God and our neighbors means that we look not only to our own interests and needs, but also to the interests and needs of others (Philippians 2:1-11), which includes our possessions, properties, and buildings
 - we believe that God has placed us in this place so others can see Him through our life together
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“The gospel...constrains and empowers us to put the needs and interests of our neighbors above our own (Phil. 2:1–4). May we sacrificially devote our possessions and property, even our buildings, toward the benefit of our neighborhoods.”

Duke Kwon

Why are we talking about theology of place?

- How might we use this nearly 100 year old church building with a renovated basement located on the corner of 56th and Broadway to love our neighbors — to promote the flourishing of our neighbors, neighborhood, and city?

Review: what is a theology of place?

- Two Teachings: (1) *Live* where you are planted & (2) *Love* where you are planted
 - A theology of place describes how God calls his people to be a faithful presence in the particular places he puts them. What we are acknowledging is that wherever we are located, God has called us and placed us there.
 - A “theology of place” recognizes that we are embodied people embedded in particular places and locations. So, we are asking: “What does God teach us about our embodied and embedded lives?”
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Review: what is a theology of place?

(1) **Live where you are planted (Genesis 1-2)**

- God “*formed*” people
from the place, for the place, for other people (Gen 2:8, 18)
 - God “planted” a garden and “placed” people in it
(Gen 2:8; 1 Chron 17:7-15; Acts 17:26-27)
 - God “placed” people in the garden to “work it & keep it”
(Gen 2:15)(i.e. your presence in a place is for stewardship of that place and its people, by cultivating it’s possibilities and protecting it from harm)
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Review: what is a theology of place?

(1) **Live where you are planted (Genesis 1-2)**

- If our church was removed from this community tomorrow, would it be a source of grief, joy, or indifference for our neighbors?
 - Do you see our church — people, place, property — as integral to the local city neighborhood and its surrounding areas? In what ways have been vital to our locality?
 - Do you think of Midtown — the people, place, and property — as rooted and planted in 46220 for the sake of being God's faithful presence there? If not, what hinders thinking this way?
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“...the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic [i.e. interpretation] of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many **activities** by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel — evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, etc. But I am saying that **these are all secondary, and that they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community.**”

Lesslie Newbigin

“[The church with Christ at the center] will be a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of the neighborhood. **It will be the church for the specific place where it lives...[it will be] for the wider community.**” In the NT, the church is the church of a place. “A church is defined by this twofold relation: **it is God’s embassy in a specific place.** Either of these vital relationships may be neglected. The congregation may be so identified with the place that it ceases to be a vehicle of God’s judgment and mercy for that place and simply [looks the same as] that place. Or it may be so concerned about the relation of its members to God that it turns its back on the neighborhood and is perceived as irrelevant to its concerns...**If the local congregation is not perceived in its own neighborhood as the place from which good news overflows in good action, the programs launched [by the church] are apt to lose their...relation to the good news** and come to be seen as part of a moral crusade rather than part of the gospel. The local congregation is the place where the proper relation is most easily and naturally kept.”

Lesslie Newbigin

“I do not think the the geographical parish (i.e. local church) can ever become irrelevant or marginal. There is a sense in which the primary sense of the neighbourhood must remain primary, because it is here that men and women relate to each other simply as human beings and not in respect of their functions in society.”

Lesslie Newbigin

Review: what is a theology of place?

(2) Love where you are planted (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

- God calls the Israelites to be his faithful presence even when they were dragged off in exile to their enemy's city, Babylon
 - *exiled* in the world, yet *sent* there by God (Jer 29:4)
 - build homes, plant gardens, start families, seek the welfare/flourishing of the city, pray for the city, in the welfare of the city you're placed lies your welfare (Jer 29:5-7)
 - take care of your home life (personal faithfulness), but also take care of your city's life (public faithfulness); engage public life of your city with particular purpose (*shalom*)
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Review: what is a theology of place?

(2) Love where you are planted (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

- What people, communities and cultures are within walking, biking, bussing, and driving distance of our church doors? How are we living for them and loving among them?
 - What neighbors are we working side-by-side with in our city, neighborhood, and local community — working side-by-side with for the purpose of doing specific good to our city, or addressing defined problems and struggles in our local communities? Where might we join neighbors in working together for the good of the city? And how might our building or property be put to use for the common good of our local community?
 - Are we moving simply for our own sake, for our own advantage, or are we moving (or staying) because we are sent by God to that place for his mission and purposes, to foster the flourishing of our city?
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New: some passages, practices, & possibilities

- Proverbs 11:10 — When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices... (ESV)
 - Proverbs 11:10 — When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices... (NIV)

 - Example: Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, AL

 - What is God doing in our neighborhood (already)? (Not what are we doing for God in the neighborhood, but what is God doing already —where do we see him already at work — in the neighborhood and how can we join him?)
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“God is always at work building his kingdom. I don’t have to invent [a] new thing to do for God, but I do need to prayerfully watch where he is at work around me, ready to join him in that work.”

Wendy Alsup



New: some passages, practices, & possibilities

- MOPS
 - Home School Co-op
 - Learning Center / Pre-School
 - Counseling Center
 - Playground
 - Community Garden / Courtyard
 - Basketball Hoop
 - Church sign with more detail
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Discussion

- Is our church building a place for us to come and merely consume Christian content, or is our building a location for serving and investing in the local neighborhood and Broad Ripple community?
- What uses of our building align with our sense of mission from God? What uses of our building align with how we are sent to be his hands and feet, salt and light in our neighborhood?
- What capacity does our building and property actually have, and how might our use of it bring rejoicing to the city?



Discussion

- If we are called to be God's faithful presence in our neighborhood, what are some opportunities we have to utilize our property, people-talent, and possessions as ways of pointing to the good news of God's sacrificial love for us?

(i.e. we do not only *speak* the gospel story but also *embody* the gospel story in our life and witness as God's people placed in the places where we live, work, and play)

- How does our building's architecture, art, layout, use of space and surrounding yard help point people to God and the Gospel? to hope and healing? to help and wholeness?



Discussion

- To your knowledge, what are some interests and needs we have in common with our neighbors? How might our building be used as a place for working together to work towards the economic, educational, racial, relational flourishing of our neighborhood?
- While old church buildings have hefty maintenance costs, what is the value of having an older church building?

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- Revelation 21:3 — And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, **the dwelling place** of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.
 - Isaiah 58:11–12 — And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in **scorched places** and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a well-watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. And your ancient ruins shall be **rebuilt**; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the **repairer** of the breach, the **restorer** of streets to dwell in.
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