

Abstract

“LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY STREAMS: A CHRISTIAN MANDATE FOR PLACEDNESS”

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Thesis under the direction of Dr. Andrew Thompson

Trees find strength in being rooted. Do humans need similar stability and placedness? This thesis explores the questions: “Is there a mandate for being placed?” and if so, “What is the impact on the local church?” In the transient, unrooted culture of the USA, the concept of place is easily lost. Individuals and whole communities are detached and disconnected. In this thesis, place will be explored through the lenses of Christian scripture, Christian theology, and social and environmental sciences. The final chapter will then explore the impact of placedness for the local church. In the first chapter, I will look at the biblical mandate for placedness, mainly focusing on the Hebrew Scriptures. The second chapter will address a theological mandate, with an emphasis on sacramental theology. The third chapter will look at the mandate for place that informs some secular studies, mainly in the fields of social sciences and environmentalism. The last chapter will then address how the local church can intentionally seek the sense of place, or placedness, that is mandated by these different studies.

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Like a Tree Planted by Streams:  
A Christian Mandate for Placedness

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## Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction	2
Chapter 2	A Biblical Mandate for Placedness	9
Chapter 3	A Theological Mandate for Placedness	40
Chapter 4	Other Mandates for Placedness	64
Chapter 5	The Placed Parish	93
	Conclusion	124
	Bibliography	125

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Since graduating high school nineteen years ago, I have lived in eight different cities in four different countries. During that time, I never lived in the same place for more than two years. When people ask where I am from, I have a hard time answering because I feel as if I am from everywhere and nowhere. I love each city I have lived in; however, my love does not go deep, and at times I find myself feeling unstable. Like a tree that has been transplanted multiple times, my root system struggles to bring in the nutrients I need; without them, it could not hold me steady in the midst of storms. While my story is a bit extreme--short of being in the military, most Americans do not move as much as I have--yet the truth is Americans are mobile. Reported by *The Atlantic*, according to a Gallup study, the USA is “one of the most geographically mobile countries in the world with an average of one in four adults having moved within the country in the past five years.”<sup>1</sup> With the increase in suburban dwelling, more people are also mobile throughout their days, traveling greater distances for work, kids’ activities, shopping, and religious gatherings. With all of this movement, it can be hard to feel particularly connected to any one location. In the beginning of his book *The Land*, Walter Brueggemann describes Western society, especially in North America, as being without place: “The sense of being lost, displaced, and homeless is pervasive in contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Chandler, “Why Do Americans Move So Much More Than Europeans?: How the national mythos and U.S. labor laws influence geographic mobility,” *The Atlantic* (Oct 21, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/10/us-geographic-mobility/504968/> (accessed Feb 19, 2019).

culture.”<sup>2</sup> Timothy Beatley, in his work *Native to Nowhere*, acknowledges the loss of place in our globalized society and argues, “We need places that provide healthy living environments and also nourish the soul--distinctive places worthy of our loyalty and commitment, places where we feel at home, places that inspire and uplift and stimulate us and that provide social and environmental sustenance.”<sup>3</sup> Beatley then goes on to argue that without place, sustainable environmental practices cannot occur. New practices can neither begin nor take root.

Image a whole forest where the trees are constantly being uprooted and replanted. The trees would not be able to protect each other in storms, and there would be constant, extreme soil erosion, let alone what it would do to the animals living in the forest. Has much of our country’s society become unsettled like this--not putting down roots in any one location? Is humanity called to live differently, to live rooted in one location?

In the following thesis, I will consider if there is a Christian mandate for being placed, and if so, what implications this holds for the local church. My argument is: In the transient, unrooted culture of the USA, the concept of place, which is found in Christian scripture and theology and is invoked by current sociologists and environmentalists, teaches us new (or new-to-us) approaches to local ministry. I believe that by having placedness, individuals and the church community can both minister to and be ministry by place. In the first chapter, I will look at the biblical mandate for placedness, mainly focusing on the Hebrew Scriptures. The second chapter will address a

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Beatley, *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004), 3.

theological mandate, with an emphasis on sacramental theology. The third chapter will look at the mandate for place that informs some secular studies, mainly in the fields of social sciences and environmentalism. The last chapter will then address how the local church can intentionally seek the sense of place, or placedness, that is mandated by these different studies.

Throughout the following work, when I refer to “place,” I am referring to a specific geographical location and the sum of its parts. Place includes the local environment and its inhabitants. Place is not only what can physically be seen but the systems that work within it: ecosystem, local history, and culture. The geographic area of the place may be a whole rural town or a neighborhood within a large city. The exact size, spatially or by population, is hard to define. If it is too large, such as a whole city, it will be hard to locate individuals who have formed attachments. If it is too small, such as one apartment complex, individuals will frequently move beyond the boundaries of that place in order to form attachments. Place is the area where a cohesive community or ecosystem can be located. A fuller definition of place will be developed inductively throughout the rest of this study.

I will also often use the term “placedness,” a term much like “rootedness.” Placedness is the attachment to the place. It is the establishment of one’s position within the place and the further bonding with the place. Placedness is an awareness of interconnection with the land, the inhabitants, and the culture of the place. Just as a tree puts down roots and by doing so is intimately connected with the area that surrounds the tree, both supporting the place and being supported by the place, placedness is the putting

down roots in an area to both find life and be life-giving to others. A person can inhabit a location and yet be disconnected with the area, unaware of aspects of the place--such as neighbors, ecosystem, history and culture. To have placedness, a person engages with the elements of place, establishing oneself as part of the place. Instead of living in an isolated pot in a vacuum chamber, to have placedness, one must allow one's roots to be part of the local forest and become part of the local ecosystem.

Before I proceed, I want to make a few final points that will help with my future arguments. First, not everything in place is naturally good. Some relationships within an ecosystem can be parasitic. While some insects help support the life of trees, such as those that break down decaying matter on the forest floor, other types of insects will eat away at a tree until the tree can no longer live. Part of being having gained some level of placedness is the ability to identify what is life-giving and what is life-destroying. One element of being placed is seeking the health of the entire place.

Secondly, I want readers to keep heterogeneous communities in mind when I am speaking of a group of people with a place. Seldom are communities without diversity, but it seems to be within human nature to gravitate toward homogeneous groups. Local churches are often a good example of homogeneity. But just as a forest may appear to be made up of mostly one species of tree, upon further study the forest is found to have a diversity of species and that adds to the health of the ecosystem. Seldom is one place made up of all the same type of people. Being aware of place will highlight the diversity of race, faith, gender identity, and economic status found within the community.

Lastly, when I talk about place and seeking placedness, I am not doing so at the detriment of what is beyond the borders of set geographical area making up place. I would argue that it is when one place is healthy and thriving and its inhabitants have that sense of place, that there are then ripples streaming out to other places. The French philosopher and theologian Jacques Ellul coined the well known phrase, “Think globally. Act locally.” The authors of *The New Parish* write argue that the reverse is also true. They write, “You have to learn to ‘act globally and think locally.’” This means allowing global circumstances to motivate your local actions, and the relational fidelity you learn at the local level to motivate your global actions. It is this prayerful practice of both movements that holds so much unexplored possibility.”<sup>4</sup>

Andrew Rumsey, in *Parish*, writes, “[Boundaries] exist in order to enable social inclusion, not frustrate it.”<sup>5</sup> In John’s Revelation, the gates of the New Jerusalem never shut.<sup>6</sup> While the New Jerusalem has clear boundaries, it is permeable. All nations are welcome and represented. When I argue for a sense of place geographically, it is by no means to cut off or detach one community from the wider area. Isolation and segregation do not seem to me to be part of God’s kingdom and I do not by any means want to advocate for such destructive practices here.

It might also be helpful to think of the analogy of wells and fences on Australian cattle farms. Often farmers on large, expansive cattle farms in Australia build wells, not

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*, Kindle ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 184.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Rumsey, *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place* (London: SCM Press, 2017), 147.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 21:25.

fences, to keep their cattle contained. It is that cattle will stay near a water source for survival and since the farm property is so wide, building fences around perimeter would simply take too many resources to build and maintain when the wells alone will do the job.<sup>7</sup> The borders are permeable, fluid in movement. Instead of spending energy trying to define where the edges of one's place is, it is better to focus on what are the items at the center that are life-giving. Instead of trying to define who and what is in and out when defining one's place, I encourage an understanding that seeks to ask: "What are the wells within the area that provide life and where are wells missing?"; "Who is currently drinking from these wells and who may be on a journey towards them because of their needs?" Another way to explain this is that community should define place; place should not define community. It is the inhabitants who, in part, transform space into place and place is fluid as community changes. Allowing place to adapt to changes in community creates the possibility of inclusion. Conversely, when place defines community, exclusion occurs, as there are limits to who is considered part of the community. Throughout this paper, I will suggest that to have placedness is not to become exclusive or cutting one local community and location off from the larger context one is found within. The challenge of being placed is not to become isolated and cut off from the more physically distant neighbors. To conclude this disclaimer, I again cite Rumsey: "The pressing contemporary challenge is thus not how to dismantle borders, but instead reconfigure them so that both 'inside' and 'outside' relationships are enabled in morally

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<sup>7</sup> This is an analogy is found in multiple missional studies to compare for bounded and center sets for approaches to evangelism. Possibly first used by Shelia Pritchard in "Wells or Fences? The Risk of Spiritual Growth," *Reality Magazine* (1994). Reprinted by Pritchard on her blog (July 11, 2011), <http://sheilapritchard.blogspot.com/2011/07/> (accessed Feb 18, 2019).

positive ways. Fundamentally, this requires starting not at a community's limits but at its centre, for boundaries are merely the extension of our core visioning purpose.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rumsey, *Parish*, 148.

## Chapter Two

### A Biblical Mandate For Placedness

Place is one of the most central themes throughout the Bible, especially in the Hebrew scriptures. The Bible starts in a garden and ends in a city. These locations are central to the meaning of these stories. The land, and humanity's place within, are central to the Israelite community of the Hebrew scriptures as they are continually moving toward, living in, or being expelled from land.<sup>9</sup> The narrative continually involves the Israelites' relationship to the land. Iain Provan and Walter Brueggemann, two biblical scholars, both see land as a central theme -- if not *the* central theme -- of scripture. Place becomes the foundation upon which these scholars build their work.<sup>10</sup> Brueggemann says, "The Bible itself is primarily concerned with the issue of being displaced and yearning for place."<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter, I will argue that scripture shows us that humans are created to be located in a specific place and have a sense of placedness. Placedness, the engagement with the local place, impacts how humanity lives in relationship with all of creation. I will first look at the movements of the people in the Hebrew scriptures. The Israelite community within these texts is often on the move, either from or toward land, which in turn impacts their level of placedness. I will argue that their relationship to land, and in

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<sup>9</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land*, 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land*; and Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land*, 2.

turn place, defines them. Second, I will look at a few examples of ways scripture tells us we are designed to be in community as an element of place. Then I will conclude the chapter with a selection of the disciplines from scripture that are related to being placed.

### **Israelites' Relationship to Place**

The Israelite story moves between being in the land and being landless.<sup>12</sup> Brueggemann argues, “Israel was *par excellence* a people with a place, a land of promise, and she was intensely concerned with it.”<sup>13</sup> The story of the Israelite people revolves around their relationship to land.

The Hebrew scriptures begin with humans being created and placed in a garden.<sup>14</sup> The garden is central to the early narrative. It is a place where humanity’s needs are provided for and where God is present amongst them. Provan points out that the creation narratives can be compared to the Ancient Near East (ANE) understanding of a temple.<sup>15</sup> In summary, he sees a series of characteristics of Eden that mirror the ANE temple. For example, the waters that flowed out from Eden mirror the spring from within the ANE temple which flows out to the four corners of the earth.<sup>16</sup> Another example is that ANE temple dedications took seven days, mirroring the seven days in the Genesis 1 creation

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Israel’s Sense of Place in Jeremiah” *The God of All Flesh and Other Essays* ed. K.C. Hanson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 2

<sup>15</sup> Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 32-38.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 32.

narrative.<sup>17</sup> The ANE temple was understood to be the dwelling place of the gods, not just a place of worship. Provan also explains how ANE temples often had staircases – picture the ziggurat structures – which were to be the staircases so the gods could climb down and join the realm of earth. Lastly, Provan also argues that Eden could be compared to the ANE understanding of a palace. Kings inhabited palaces and in the ANE, kings were thought to be divine. Therefore, Eden was the place of divine reign, and at the center there was a garden which performed multiple functions.<sup>18</sup> Provan concludes that if the garden is compared to that of a temple-palace, then it is to be understood that the garden is meant to be where God resides with humanity.<sup>19</sup> Provan also argues that Eden should be viewed as the world as a whole, not a singular place within.<sup>20</sup> In that case all of earth becomes the dwelling place of God. Thus every place within is important because it is the dwelling place of God. This will be significant in the next chapter when we discuss the sacramental potentiality of creation. For now, it speaks of the significance of land, an essential element of place. Later in this chapter I will address the importance of God's presence and placedness. For now it is important to recognize that, according to Hebrew scripture, God made earth in a way that being placed, at least in part, means being in God's presence. From the beginning of Genesis, land and placement within are important. In addition, God does not just create humanity to be isolated but creates

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 34.

humanity as part of a larger ecosystem and makes it placed as part of that community, as Eden symbolizes.<sup>21</sup>

As the Genesis narrative continues, humanity finds itself placed but moving towards an expulsion from place. Brueggemann summarizes the first eleven chapters of Genesis by saying: “[It] is about people fully rooted in the land living toward expulsion and loss of land. Successively, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his family, and finally the folks at Babel do everything they can to lose the land, and eventually they do. That history is about presuming upon the land and as a result losing it.”<sup>22</sup> Land and placedness is foundational to the ancestral narratives of the early Hebrew scriptures. While they are in the land, they are continually in threat of losing it because of their behavior. Without land--a specific geographical location--to attach to and be part of, the Israelite community is at risk of losing their present place and in turn, their placedness.

Brueggemann argues that at this point in the narrative, humanity takes advantage of the land, demanding much of it. This is what leads to being removed from the land.<sup>23</sup> Humanity becomes unplaced. The placedness of humanity meets its climactic end in Genesis 11 with the building of the Tower of Babel. It can be argued that part of problem symbolized by the Tower is that humans have begun to remove themselves from their sense of placedness. They are separating themselves from the larger system of creation. They build a tower to God instead of recognizing God’s presence is amongst them. They

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 33. I discuss later the argument for a reading of Genesis that does not set humanity apart, against, or over the rest of creation.

<sup>22</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

are not valuing their connection with the land they are in. They are disconnecting from place.

Brueggemann divides Genesis into two sections with the Tower of Babel as the divide, and claims this division sets the framework in which one can understand land theology in the Old Testament. He states:

These two histories set the parameters of land theology in the Bible: Presuming upon the land and being expelled from it; trusting toward a land not yet possessed, but empowered by anticipation of it. Our lives are set between expulsion and anticipation, of losing and expecting, of being uprooted and rerooted, of being dislocated because of impertinence and being relocated in trust. Clearly these stories are not remote from the contemporary experiences of Western culture.<sup>24</sup>

When the Israelites have land, it is easy for them to take it for granted and abuse what they have been given. Because the Israelites' placedness comes from their attachment to the Promised Land, when they lose the land, they also lose their sense of place. When they are without placedness, they long for it, either by leaning into the memory of place or the promise of future placedness. After the scattering of humanity at the conclusion of the tower's construction, the narrative continues with the story of Abram and a movement back toward being placed. God does not desire for people to be detached. God, throughout scripture, advocates for the "victims of displacement."<sup>25</sup> "God intends that the displaced shall be commodiously placed in an ordered, secure human community."<sup>26</sup> This can be seen in the story of Abram becoming Abraham.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Homefulness* ed. K.D. Hanson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 23.

God promises Abram in chapter 12, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”<sup>27</sup>

God again speaks to Abram in chapter 17, “I will always keep the promise I have made to you and your descendants, because I am your God and their God. I will give you and them the land in which you are now a foreigner. I will give the whole land of Canaan to your family forever, and I will be their God.”<sup>28</sup> God speaks to Abram and promises him land and placedness. While there was scattering of humanity after the destruction of the tower, God desires for humanity to find placedness and offers that specifically to Abram. God takes a wandering, childless couple, aliens in a foreign land, and promises them land, community through a growing family, and a fruitful place that will be their own. It is a promise of place for the placeless.

Abram listens to God’s promise and moves in “confident expectation.”<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann argues that, “The Bible considers at length that people without land have the resources and stamina to live toward a land they do not possess.”<sup>30</sup> Throughout, they live into the promise of land by finding some sense of placedness in the present through hope and trust in the promise. Abram is an early example of living into the promise. It is

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<sup>27</sup> Genesis 12:1-3 (NRSV).

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 17:7-8 (NRSV).

<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

an ability to find placedness even in unstable situations. For Abram, the challenge was not having possession of the land. In present times, there are a variety of troubles that make finding placedness hard, but by living into the promise of place, one can find placedness anywhere.

Abram's relationship to the land is an interesting one. He is located in a land but he is not rooted in it because he does not hold possession of it. He is a sojourner of the land that is promised to him. Even though his is not in possession of the land, he does well. Abram has a flourishing household and great possessions.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, he finds himself often on the move, traveling when there is trouble.<sup>32</sup> He and his children for the next few generations are moving towards the land.<sup>33</sup> The movement toward place is central to their life and their faith as they seek out placedness.

Pilgrimage and wandering are themes throughout scripture, and while the journey is important and often teaches the individuals(s) who are on the move, there is a movement towards a final destination. The final destination is a location where rest and establishment can be found, and where people can be fruitful. When people are on the move, whether they recognize it or not, they are seeking to find placedness. In the narrative of Abram, he has more than a name change; he also has a change in both identity and location. He goes from a childless father without placedness, to the father of many nations and the first to receive the promise of place. He becomes the father of the

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<sup>31</sup> See Genesis 13:2

<sup>32</sup> See Genesis 12 and 20.

<sup>33</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 5-8, 21.

Israelite community. Abram, in both name and in his way of living, becomes the original keeper of the promise of place.

The generations that live in Egypt, from the time of Joseph to the exodus led by Moses, maintain an unrooted reality. While they initially have the best land and enjoy prosperity, their prosperity threatens the Egyptians and they quickly become the oppressed.<sup>34</sup> They are not in the land promised to them, nor are they living in freedom. This is not a land where they can find placedness because “it is imperial and attained by management and not as a gift.”<sup>35</sup> They are still moving toward the promise but have not yet arrived.

The Exodus narrative is, in part, about the tension with placedness that the Hebrew people feel. They long for freedom but that means journeying through a desert of unknowns. For the Israelites, their options are either to traverse the unknown desert or stay in slavery where only their most basic needs are provided. Neither situation would bring immediate security and placedness, but only one holds the promise of eventual placedness.

As the narrative continues in Exodus, the relationship with the land is a precarious one. The Israelites are wanderers without place.<sup>36</sup> Again the people are without land, meandering slowly toward a promised land. While the Israelites are in the wilderness, their relationship to the land is different. Brueggemann states, “[They are] not tied to,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>35</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 25. See Genesis 47:6 and 47:27.

<sup>36</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 5-8.

dependent upon, or subservient to the land.”<sup>37</sup> While they are wandering in the desert, God provides for the Israelites directly with water, manna, and quail.<sup>38</sup> There is a broken relationship between the Israelites and the land, thus the land is unable to directly provide for the needs of the Israelites. It is by being broken off from the land that God’s glory is revealed. God is “making empty full.”<sup>39</sup> This is not a destination, though. The Israelite destination is a place of harmony and shalom between Israel and creation. As a result, the needs will again be provided for by the land itself.

God’s presence and glory are found in the wilderness. The wilderness does not equal death or being alone.<sup>40</sup> By finding life in the midst of wilderness, the Israelite community is given a sign of the future and its members are able to live into the promise of placedness that is to come once they arrive in the Promised Land. It is a promise that they only realize in part while in the wilderness but will experience in fullness once they enter the Promised Land. It is a foreshadowing of what is to come. Brueggemann goes on to say, “The surprise is that landlessness can become nourishing.”<sup>41</sup> It is then those who “maintained their expectancy and have grown neither weary nor cynical” who eventually move into the promised land and eventually become placed again.<sup>42</sup> The generation of grumblers does not gain access to the land. It is important to note though that while there

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>38</sup> Exodus 16-17

<sup>39</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 36.

are blessings in the wilderness, these are not to be idolized, idealized, or romanticized. The time of provision in the wilderness is part of a larger narrative of restoring a people to a promised land.

The relationship between the Israelites and the land changes once they enter into the Promised Land and find placedness. They are rooted again where the land is for “satiation.”<sup>43</sup> This is in contrast to their time as slaves in Egypt and as desert wanderers. “[The] land shall be secure and life-giving,” offers Brueggemann.<sup>44</sup> The Israelites, once in the land, are to see land as a gift.<sup>45</sup> They do not obtain the land through their own strengths or abilities. The land is given to them by God. Brueggemann shows how the land is given through the speaking of God and the listening of the Israelites. This demonstrates relationship between God and the Israelites. The giving of the land binds God and Israel as giver and receiver.<sup>46</sup> The land and the placedness that can come with it are gifts from God and demonstrate God’s desire for humanity.

Being placed has its own set of problems, though. Being in the land can lead to the temptation of forgetting land as gift. The key to avoiding this temptation is to remember the history of the Israelite community and what has been learned from the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>46</sup> It may be helpful to acknowledge here that I am not calling into question if the migration of the Hebrew people happened literally as given in the Pentateuch and Joshua or over time as some historical findings may suggest. I am focusing on sense of a call for the Hebrew peoples to find placedness not how they literally found that placedness. I am also not addressing the possible genocide and other inhumane acts that the Hebrew people participated in once they arrived in the Promised Land.

different ways the Israelites have been in relationship with God and with land.

Remembering helps to avoid temptation.<sup>47</sup>

Once the Israelites are placed, they are meant to be aware of the gift of land but also be aware that there are still threats. Brueggemann argues that entry into the Promised Land requires the transformation of the people. They cannot enter into the new land while still being the same people they once were. Instead, through transformation, “a slave becomes an heir, a helpless child becomes a mature inheritor.”<sup>48</sup>

There is no guarantee that the land will be maintained. Remaining in the land and the corresponding placedness require obedience. This is why, before they even cross into the Promised Land, there are different requirements upon entry to the land. The book of Joshua opens with God speaking to Joshua saying, “Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.”<sup>49</sup> Following commandments is central to remaining placed. I will address later in this chapter the connection between keeping God’s commandments and Hebrew people’s placedness. For now it is sufficient to say that for the Hebrew people to stay on the land and grow in their sense of placedness, they must follow God’s commandments, take care of the land and one another, and see the land as God’s gift. This is in opposition to seeing land as something that can be possessed. The perspective

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<sup>47</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 50-51.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>49</sup> Joshua 1:7 (NRSV).

of land-as-gift is what sets the Israelites apart from other communities and a key to placedness.<sup>50</sup>

Deuteronomy also speaks of how land is to be seen as gift. In Deuteronomy 6:10-13, the Hebrew people are promised that they will receive what they do not build or plant, as they are receiving previously-occupied land.<sup>51</sup> They will be unable to say that they have made their new homes in the Promised Land with their own hands, or that they acquired it with their own strength. Instead, the land is gifted to them from God. The vineyards are not planted by their hands. The city walls are not built by their people. By being gifted land, the Hebrew people are to have a humble attitude as receivers. Brueggemann says, “This old account of houses in ancient Israel acknowledges that houses are a free, unearned, inexplicable gift. This uncommon conviction makes sense when we remember that the earliest theological vision and memory in Israel came out of marginal, disadvantaged peasants who were exploited and marginalized.”<sup>52</sup> The once-slaves in a foreign land are now being given place. Earlier, they were the literal builders of a place they could not own. Now they have been gifted land and place that can be their own. Their story is being made new as they become a placed people.

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<sup>50</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 70.

<sup>51</sup> The inheritance of land through the dispossession of others is troubling text. It would take more room than is allocated in this thesis to address this concern. When talking about the history and culture that, in part make up place, it is important to recognize modern-day dispossessions that occur. To ignore this theme would be detrimental. I operate from a hermeneutical framework that does not believe that just because the Israelites did it in the Old Testament does not mean it is appropriate today. Dispossession of land today can be terribly harmful to place and its people.

<sup>52</sup> Brueggemann, *The Practice of Homefulness*, 6.

Brueggemann identifies an alternative view that is found in the Hebrew scriptures where land is not seen as a gift but a result of hard work and righteousness.<sup>53</sup>

Brueggemann uses Psalms 37 and 112 as examples of “self-congratulatory righteousness,” which “reflects the sentiment of those who believe that their material situation of prosperity is their right and their achievement, their reward for services rendered.”<sup>54</sup> This demonstrates how the Israel community loses sight of the concept of land as gift. It is in the forgetting of land as gift that, at least in part, leads to being without place.

One of Brueggemann’s main points in an essay titled, “Israel’s Sense of Place in Jeremiah” is to show the unique understandings of land (arets / אֶרֶץ) and inheritance (n’halah / נַחֲלָה) that are unique to Israel.<sup>55</sup> He focuses on the Promised Land being God’s land inherited by the Israelite community. This shows a deep connection between land and inheritance.<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere in the essay, Brueggemann argues that to stay placed the Hebrew people must remember the gift of land; otherwise they will once again be without land. Yet loss of land is exactly what happens. The Israelite community eventually experiences exile and loss of placedness. Brueggemann explains, “Exile follows self-indulgent consumerism.”<sup>57</sup> Exile is a direct result of not living into the truth of land as a gift. While land is a gift, it comes with its challenges. “Land is indeed a problem in

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> Brueggemann, “Israel’s Sense of Place,” 45.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 45-47.

<sup>57</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 95.

Israel. Time after time, Israel saw the land of promise become the land of problem. The very land that contained the sources of life drove kings to become agents of death.”<sup>58</sup>

Land cannot be seen as both entitlement and gift at the same time. Seeing land as an acquisition or obligation leads to behaviors that in turn leads to expulsion from the very same land and humanity becomes displaced.

The story of Naboth’s vineyard is a helpful example for exploring land-as-gift.<sup>59</sup> The King of Samaria wants Naboth’s vineyard for a vegetable garden. He offers an exchange of land or a “worthy” payment. Naboth refuses saying, “The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance.”<sup>60</sup> The king eventually acquires the land through unethical means. One important aspect to this story is the connection with the land. This land was Naboth’s inherited land (from God). It has been in his family, most likely, for many generations. It is likely a vineyard because that is what the family, from years of experience, knows grows best there. Not only is the king asking for land that is not his to have, he is going to misuse it. This shows the difference between one who knows the land and one who does not.<sup>61</sup> When land-as-gift is forgotten, it may become misused.

In 1 Samuel, Samuel warns the Israelite people of the dangers of kings. “He [a future king] will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>59</sup> 1 Kings 21.

<sup>60</sup> 1 Kings 21:3 (NRSV).

<sup>61</sup> Rebecca Abts Wright and Andrew R. H. Thompson, class lecture, “People of the Land” (University of the South School of Theology Advanced Degrees Program, June 15, 2017).

them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants.”<sup>62</sup> In the story of Naboth’s vineyard, we see this warning come to pass. Michael Northcott explores the change in humanity from being gatherers to agrarian, suggesting that Genesis warns of dangers that come with this change. Northcott’s charge is exemplified in the story of Naboth’s vineyard. Northcott writes of that the dangers of human change “put[s] them in position of those who are like gods in relation to other species.” He continues, “The narrative does not so much commend dominion as narrate what happens when human power over the land and other species becomes too domineering.”<sup>63</sup> The king in the story of Naboth’s vineyard is a perfect example of dominance and becoming like a god to control others, disconnecting himself from the community and the land.

The book of Jeremiah is one narrative that describes the Hebrew people losing their land as they had been warned. Jeremiah is written at the boundary, including the shift between concern for losing the land and the land actually being lost.<sup>64</sup> Jeremiah 2:4-13 essentially describes a lawsuit to determine who is to blame for the loss of land.<sup>65</sup> In verses 6 and 7, it is argued that God led the Israelites out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into their own given place as an inheritance, a land that has now been defiled. Brueggemann points out a difference in how land is referred to in these two

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<sup>62</sup> 1 Samuel 8:14-15 (NRSV).

<sup>63</sup> Michael Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 16.

<sup>64</sup> Brueggemann, “Israel’s Sense of Place,” 46.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

verses. The indefinite singular article “a” is used to refer to the wilderness through which Israel was brought, whereas the land that the Israelites defiled is referred to as “my [God’s] land.”<sup>66</sup> The possessive pronoun reminds the Israelites that the land where they were placed, but from which they are now at risk of being displaced, was gifted land from God. This land was set apart from other lands. In these verses it is also important to notice that the attributes of the land shift from “land of abundance” (Deut 6:11) to “land of defilement” (Jer 2:16).<sup>67</sup> The Promised Land is no longer full of promises and the people are living again in a wasted land because of their actions. “Israel will have land only when the land is perceived as inheritance from the Father.”<sup>68</sup>

There is a strong connection between loss of relationship, both spousal and parental, with loss of place.<sup>69</sup> The behaviors that are essential elements of placedness will be explored more fully later in this chapter but for now it is helpful to note the connections between the land and the relationships on the land. Part of not seeing land as gift and thus losing it is tied up with how members of humanity relate one to each other.

In Jeremiah, once the Israelites are in exile and are without placedness, they are nevertheless instructed to live into the promise of land. Jeremiah 29:5-7 is a good example of this:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 50.

do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.<sup>70</sup>

The exiled people are instructed to settle in, build, marry, and work. They are to live as if placed. This includes restoring relationships to a positive state. This mandate is the opposite of Deuteronomy, where they are promised land and houses which they did not build.<sup>71</sup> Earlier, they were going from being the enslaved and marginalized to gaining land. Now they are going from a place of land and power to having to do the labor once again. This leads me to conclude that even in exile, God's people are called to live the lifestyle of placedness as if in the Promised Land. God's people are to live into the ways of caring for land and one another. This may be, in part, to train for when the people are again gifted land, or to make place out of the placelessness of the present.

Exploring Jeremiah, Brueggemann observes “[a] curious transformation of landlessness to announce that land-loss is the way of faith to the new land.”<sup>72</sup> Brueggemann argues that it is important for the Israelite community not to cling to what is being lost but to trust that in death there is new life. They are no longer to try to hold on to what they once had, but rather find a new sense of placedness in their new situation. Jeremiah encourages the exiled to settle in and build houses. They are to find a way of living as if placed. They are to discover that “barren exile is fruitful garden” and that “the hated Babylon is the place of belonging.”<sup>73</sup> Essentially, they are encouraged to live the

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<sup>70</sup> Jeremiah 29:5-7 (NRSV).

<sup>71</sup> Deuteronomy 6.

<sup>72</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 115.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

way they were supposed to live before the exile and to “seek *shalom*” with the promise that land will then be reacquired.<sup>74</sup> It may look different but placedness can be found again if they follow God’s instructions.

The curse can be reversed and the land is an essential part of this reversal.<sup>75</sup> Brueggemann argues, “the land is the essential component in the resurrection of Israel.”<sup>76</sup> He goes on to say, “All three exilic prophets -- Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah -- understand the inherited land to be the most visible, most significant embodiment of deliverance from exile and restoration.”<sup>77</sup> Land is a central theme in the exilic documents, not only because they are without land but because they are to live into the promise of being gifted place once again.

The identity of the Israelite people is tied up with their connection to the land throughout the Hebrew scriptures. They flow between times of placedness to times of placelessness and back again. The Israelites are gifted land, lose land, and then are placed back in land once again. The cycle continues. For the Israelite people, the connection with land -- and the people and things attached to that land -- is central to their narrative. How they relate to land and those in connection with the land determines their ability to have placedness. Land is deeply attached to their stories of curses and blessings. Land is key to their freedom and redemption. God desires for the Israelite people to have

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Brueggemann, “Israel’s Sense of Place,” 54.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 55.

placedness and God continually leads them on a journey back to place. Relationship to land, and thus to place, is essential to understanding the Hebrew scriptures.

### **Placed in Relationship**

Being placed goes beyond inheritance of land but is also about the attached relationships. Placedness does not come in isolation. By relationships, I mean humanity's relationship with creation, humanity's relationship with one another, and humanity's relationship with God. All three relationships contribute to placedness.

First, I will address humanity's relationship with creation. In an article on the importance of good hermeneutical approaches to scripture, Northcott argues that depending on which hermeneutical framework one uses, the approach to scripture will change. This change then impacts how scripture does or does not advocate for stewardship of creation. He suggests that when scripture is read with a "ritual and cultural-linguistic" hermeneutic, then scripture becomes "culture-shaping, character-forming genre which forms part of the larger set of processes and rituals that together construct moral communities of the kind Christians inhabit."<sup>78</sup> He goes on to say, "these practices and virtues are shaped by the larger narrative of [s]cripture, which, in relation to nature, speaks of a covenant between creator and created which sets limits on how and what the most exalted and influential of creatures--humans--may do in creation. And when these limits are ignored, it indicates that the stability and fertility of

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Northcott, "Loving Scripture and Nature," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3 no. 2 (Jun 2009), 251.

creation is lost.”<sup>79</sup> This hermeneutical framework results in the identification of the humanity’s relationship with all of creation and responsibilities for creation.

Citing work by Theodore Hiebert, Northcott argues for the importance of viewing the agrarian nature of scriptural context: “[In] *The Yahwist’s Landscape*, Hiebert (1996) unfolds the rich cultural traditions of agrarianism that framed and formed the covenantal relation to nature in the narratives of Genesis 1-9.”<sup>80</sup> Northcott continues, “Hiebert suggests that the ecological wisdom manifest in the historical shaping of these narratives is discernible but only from an awareness of agrarianism as a living cultural system.”<sup>81</sup> The way the Israelites related to the land is an essential key to understanding who the Israelites were and what was meant by their scriptures.

With this hermeneutical framework in mind, Northcott argues, “When Scripture is read as canon, it speaks clearly of human duties to care for otherkind and to respect a cosmic covenant between Creator and all creatures.”<sup>82</sup> Northcott argues that nature is an essential element of humanity, making humans human. Thus the place of creation within scripture cannot be ignored. He argues for a hermeneutic that recognizes the importance of creation within the narrative. For Northcott, creation and humanity’s relationship with it are essential aspects of the Hebrew scriptures.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 252. Theodore Hiebert *The Yahwist Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 247.

Provan sees the interconnection of creation within the narrative of the Hebrew scriptures and states that, “the world is created for creatures.”<sup>83</sup> Creation was not made to meet any of God’s needs, for God, by the nature of God, does not have needs. Creation was created for itself, which implies a deep interconnectedness between all creatures. All of creation is part of one creation, created for itself and its various parts. Creatures are interdependent. This view of creation is different from other creation narratives found in the ANE where humans were an afterthought from a worn-out god to meet the needs of said god.

According to Genesis, humans are the pinnacle of creation and yet also intimately interconnected with the rest of creation.<sup>84</sup> The same earth that Adam is formed out of is the earth that God uses to form the other animals.<sup>85</sup> Then God puts Adam in the garden “to till and to keep.”<sup>86</sup> The Hebrew word for till is עָבַד, meaning “to work” or “to serve.”<sup>87</sup> With this understanding in mind, Adam is not to rule over creation but is to be in service, caring for the garden and its inhabitants. Adam has a unique position within creation but is part of creation nonetheless.

Jonathan Wilson, in his book *God’s Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation*, writes, “The ‘redemption’ declared and described in Deuteronomy is grounded

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<sup>83</sup> Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 79.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>85</sup> Both are formed out of אֲדָמָה (Genesis 2:7 and 2:19).

<sup>86</sup> Genesis 2:15 (NRSV).

<sup>87</sup> *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 712. Dr. Becky Wright and Dr. Andy Thompson’s summer course “People of the Earth,” (University of the South: School of Theology, June 12, 2017).

in creation: life in the land and with one another on the basis of life that we form from the land.”<sup>88</sup> He also writes, “For these prophets, the turn to life is profoundly and concretely

rooted in the land. When Israel turns from God, the land is cursed and life begins to fail.”

<sup>89</sup> The rest of creation is intimately tied up with how humans live life. <sup>90</sup> For example, in Deuteronomy 28, God tells the Israelites what will happen if they obey God’s

commandments and what will happen if they do not. God warns the Israelites that if they disobey, the results will be devastating. God warns, “You shall carry much seed into the

field but shall gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm

shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off.”<sup>91</sup> The failure of crops is a

result of disobedience to God. It can be argued that it is not because God is directly

punishing the Israelites; instead, when humanity lives outside of God’s commands, then humanity is living out of balance with the way creation is designed to work. When

humanity is off-kilter, the rest of creation becomes that way too, leading to poor harvests and, ultimately, displacement.

To find placedness, humans are to recognize the unique role they play within all of creation. They are caretakers or stewards of creation yet they are not separate or

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<sup>88</sup> Jonathan R. Wilson, *God’s Good Word: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 162.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>90</sup> It is hard to argue this today when we witness the choices we make as human having an impact on creation. We see this in forest degradation, strip mining, and CO2 emissions changing climate to list just a few examples.

<sup>91</sup> Gen 28:38-40 (NRSV).

removed from creation, nor are they lesser or more than creation. Humanity is part of creation and to be placed is to live in a healthy relationship with the rest of creation.

Second, I will address humanity's relationship with itself. Being placed is about being in relationship, or community, with other humans. Part of maintaining this connection is acting with love toward one another. Throughout scripture there are a plethora of ways that "loving thy neighbor" is mandated. Some are obvious while others are more nuanced. In the Old Testament, the argument for community begins at creation. Provan states, "All human beings are image bearers of God, share in governance over the cosmos and have the same rights."<sup>92</sup> To see God in one another, image bearers all created by the same Creator, is the basis for our call to love one another and leads us to live communally.

Yet not long into the Genesis narrative, we see the breakdown of community between Cain and Abel. Cain asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" after the death of Abel.<sup>93</sup> Cain is called to be his brother's keeper as part of community, a building block for placedness. Cain is cutting ties with his brother and breaking the relationship. Provan goes on to explain that now because of Cain's actions and the breaking apart of community, "[t]ragically, the disruption between the human and the land is now greater" than the curse that led to the expulsion from Eden in the previous chapter of Genesis.<sup>94</sup> Breaking relationship with other humans results also in the breaking relationship with the rest of creation. The relationships within humanity, with creation, and with God are all

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<sup>92</sup> Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 191.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 198; Genesis 4:9.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

interconnected. Often, breaking one relationship causes other relationships also to break. Broken relationships lead to broken placedness. David Brown points out that Cain, once he breaks this relationship, goes and is part of the first city to be built. Brown argues that city here is a symbol of self-reliance (as opposed to reliance on God).<sup>95</sup> Cain not only breaks his relationship with his brother but also with God.

Deuteronomy teaches a way of living that is not only obedience to God but a way of sustainable living with creation. Wilson states that, “The instructions of Deuteronomy represent and form a people who are to grow in their understanding in life.”<sup>96</sup> The instructions are not simply to please God or receive some gift from God, but so that we have a way of living that contributes to life not death, creation not destruction.

Provan discusses the Ten Commandments and points out that the last seven are instructions on how to live rightly with other humans. He argues that God requires humanity not to try to manipulate relationships. Instead God explains a correct way to relate with God through the first three commandments. This is the same God that instructs us not to manipulate one another but to relate justly with one another: “Our vision of the nature of the cosmos as a whole is intimately connected with our vision of humanness and society. Living well with God is bound up with living well with our

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<sup>95</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 163.

<sup>96</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Word*, 161.

fellow creatures.”<sup>97</sup> Humanity is designed to be in relationship. Right living with one another is required to live well and find placedness.

The New Testament expands upon the need for community. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes the great commandment, in part, as “love thy neighbor as thyself.”<sup>98</sup> Later in Matthew, Jesus speaks of what loving thy neighbor looks like in part: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned.<sup>99</sup> Throughout the New Testament, there are many examples of how we are to live justly and act mercifully with one another. Humanity is even instructed to offer excessive forgiveness, to be offensively generous, and to even love one’s enemies.

Jesus demonstrates the importance of relationships by often restoring individuals to their communities. Throughout his ministry he comes across individuals who have been removed from their communities, sometimes due to their actions and other times due to illnesses. Jesus not only heals these individuals but in doing so restores their place within the local community. Jesus heals the hemorrhaging woman, frees the man of demon possession, and forgives the adulterous woman. In doing so, Jesus restores their placedness by taking away the elements that blocked them from being part of the community.

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<sup>97</sup> The use of “creatures” in Provan’s writing appears to mainly be speaking of humanity in this context. Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 206.

<sup>98</sup> Matthew 22:39 (KJV).

<sup>99</sup> Matthew 25:31-46.

The concept of community is then expanded upon in the Epistles. Paul speaks of the church as one body, not a collection of individuals but one united community.<sup>100</sup> Provan argues, “Only in community can humanity fulfil the human vocation.”<sup>101</sup> This concept of unity again emphasizes the importance of recognizing and supporting the interconnectedness of humanity.

Brueggemann also ties the importance of land to the importance of caring for one’s neighbors. While care for the land is important in and of itself, it is also important because without healthy land, people suffer. It is the case that the land possessed or the land promised is by definition a communal concern. Brueggemann writes:

It will not do to make the individual person the unit of decision-making because in both Testaments the land possessed or promised concerns the whole people. Radical decisions in obedience are of course the stuff of biblical faith, but now it cannot be radical decisions in a private world without brothers and sisters, without pasts and futures, without turf to be managed and cherished as a partner in the decisions. The unit of decision-making is the community and that always with reference to the land.<sup>102</sup>

Brueggemann argues for a communal understanding of land. Land is not something to be privately owned and controlled. Land was given to the Israelites as a community to be used by the whole community and to be a blessing to the whole community.<sup>103</sup> To be placed is to recognize the interconnectedness within humanity and between the land and humanity.

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<sup>100</sup> Such as 1 Cor 12:12-14, Eph 4:1-16, and Romans 12:4

<sup>101</sup> Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 89.

<sup>102</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 199.

<sup>103</sup> Even today how land is used and how it impacts the entire community should be considered. There are regulations on what can be dumped into a river partially in consideration of everyone who lives downstream.

Lastly, I will address humanity's relationship with God. Seeing humans as part of creation reminds humanity of its relationships with the rest of creation but also with the Creator.<sup>104</sup> The existence of creation itself demonstrates the existence of a Creator. Being placed is dependent on our relationship with God. As touched on above, Provan's work comparing the creation narrative with that of the ANE points to the understanding of creation as a metaphor for temple. The temple was a place where God took up residency, not simply a place of worship.<sup>105</sup> This speaks of God being present on earth. Part of finding placedness is becoming aware of God's presence in that space. Provan suggests that "Eden is not a 'place' whose location has long been forgotten. It is the *experience* of being in right relationship with God and with creation."<sup>106</sup> This understanding of Eden is found in Ezekiel. The King of Tyre was said to have once lived in "Eden, the Garden of God" until he became filled with iniquity.<sup>107</sup> When we are not held back by sin, we are able to find ourselves dwelling in the presence of God. Being placed is being with God.

Dwelling with God may most clearly be seen and understood in the Incarnation. God took on human flesh to dwell with humanity in a very tangible way. Brueggemann argues that God is not only dwelling in a tangible way with humanity, but Jesus ushers in new land arrangements. There are new ways to approach land. Those who hold tightly onto land will lose it while those who are without land but live into the promise of land

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<sup>104</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Word*, 9.

<sup>105</sup> Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 32.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 39; Ezekiel 28:13-15.

will gain land.<sup>108</sup> Those who are placed but do not see the blessing of place or who misuse the blessing will lose their placedness. Those who are without place but live into the hope of placedness, will find place. This echos the Israelite community's ebbs and flows of being placed.

In the Revelation to John, the new earth again becomes the dwelling place of God. In the final chapters of Revelation, John writes, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his people.'"<sup>109</sup> Throughout the explanation of the new earth, the intention of the renewed place, the New Jerusalem, is to be in relationship with God. Thus, if God's people are to live into the promise of this renewed heaven and earth, then it is to be understood that relationship with God is important. To have complete placedness, the presence of God is to be known and experienced.

Scripture advocates for healthy, loving relationships. Humanity is to be in relationship with itself, with the rest of creation, and with God. Along with land, it is only with these three types of relationships that humanity can have placedness.

### **Disciplines of Scripture are Related to Place**

Another way of understanding the biblical precedence of place, and its interconnectedness with humanity, is by exploring the disciplines that scripture sets out for humanity. I've already touched on this when addressing the Ten Commandments in the previous section but it is worth further exploration. Northcott shows that when

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<sup>108</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 161.

<sup>109</sup> Revelation 21:3 (NRSV).

scripture is read as a canon--a whole piece of literature--then clear standards for humanity's care for creation emerges.<sup>110</sup> To care for creation is to care for place--the land and its inhabitants.

The Torah, for instance, is full of laws that regulate land management.<sup>111</sup> Brueggemann shows one example as he draws a connection between graven images and "land as gift."<sup>112</sup> The instruction to have no image of a god is to guard against making "controllable representations of our best loyalties and visions."<sup>113</sup> When this happens we lose the sense of the divine and "transcendence is domesticated."<sup>114</sup> When this happens God becomes a resource and a tool used by humanity, and land becomes nothing but a resource to accomplish this manipulation. Brueggemann concludes, "When the land is fully controlled, it is easy to imagine that the land has been generated by the community and can be used for its own objectives."<sup>115</sup> This leads humanity to lose sight of land as a gift and in turn lose placedness.

There is a strong tie between the practice of sabbath that gives rest to the land and the concept of caring for others.<sup>116</sup> Stewardship is about good and just management of both the land and its inhabitants.<sup>117</sup> Brueggemann argues that while "land is for sharing"

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<sup>110</sup> Northcott, "Loving Scripture and Nature," 247.

<sup>111</sup> Brueggemann, *Land*, 56.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

the dangers of land often distract us from the instructions to care for the poor.<sup>118</sup>

Brueggemann explores Deuteronomy 10:12-22 to argue that beyond seeing land as gift it is an “obligation to the stranger.”<sup>119</sup> Verse 19 states, “You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” The Israelites are to have mercy on those whom they find without land because of the Israelites’ history with land, both having and losing it.

Sabbath is an example of how God’s instructions to humanity reinforce the idea of the interconnection within humanity, and between humanity and the rest of creation. Provan cites Brueggemann in regards to Sabbath: The commandment on sabbath calls for “a human community...peaceably engaged in neighbor-respecting life that is not madly engaged in production and consumption, but one that knows a limit to such activity and so has at the center of its life an enactment of peaceableness that bespeaks the settled rule of [God].”<sup>120</sup> Provan argues that sabbath shows commonality with the rest of creation.<sup>121</sup> All of creation is to rest on the sabbath day in remembrance of the creation story and humanity’s place as part of creation and their reliance on the Creator.

When looking at scripture with the lens of land usage and placedness, the disciplines and commandments are seen as guidelines to support good relations with the land, with all of creation including the rest of humanity, and with God. These instructions are what allow humanity to find placedness.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Brueggemann, *Practices of Homefulness*, 11.

<sup>120</sup> Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 206.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 223; Exodus 20:8-1.

Both the Old and New Testaments advocate for placedness. This can be seen through the importance of land in the Hebrew narratives, through the importance of relationships within humanity, with the rest of creation, and with God. Many of the laws and commandments we find in the scriptures are there to help lead humanity toward place and placedness.

## Chapter Three

### A Theological Mandate for Placedness

One of the essential characteristics of the local church is that it comes together to worship as a community. Yet Kieran Flanagan, a sociologist, argues that as the world has become disenchanted and disconnected from place, worship has become more about utility.<sup>122</sup> David Brown concurs: “Worship has therefore to be seen as more than just a matter of strengthening the community for the mission and service. At its heart lies the adoration of God, basking in his presence in and for its own sake.”<sup>123</sup> How do we return from a utilitarian or consumerist style of worship to one that basks? One essential way to bask in the presence is to participate in the sacraments. Yet, what are sacraments? Does place have the potential to be sacramental in nature? Brown writes in *God and Enchantment of Place* that part of his aim is “to engage the reader in a form of perception that has largely been lost in our utilitarian age, experiencing the natural world and human imitations of it not just as means to some further end but as themselves the vehicle that makes possible an encounter with God, discovering an enchantment, an absorption that like worship requires no further justification.”<sup>124</sup> How can we experience the transcendent God? Does place hold this potential? The local place can, in fact, offer the means to experience the transcendent God.

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<sup>122</sup> Cited in Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 19-20.

<sup>123</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 20.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

In this chapter I ask the question: Is there a theological mandate for placedness? I argue that within a sacramental view of creation, place holds the potential to be a sign of God's grace. Therefore, placedness can be viewed as part of God's design for creation. Placedness is a means for discovering and valuing God's presence in the particulars of place. I will address what the sacraments are, broadly speaking, and then look at creation--as a specific element of place--as sacramental.

### **What is Sacrament?**

The Catechism of the Episcopal Church defines the sacraments as “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”<sup>125</sup> John Macquarrie in *A Guide to Sacraments* states that a characteristic of a sacrament is “considering one thing as a sign of another.”<sup>126</sup> He then goes on to show that it is more than just a sign. Hans Boersma uses a helpful analogy to show how a sacrament as “sign” can be unhelpful or limiting language. Boersma argues that the difference between a sign and a sacrament is that a sacrament is about participation and real presence.<sup>127</sup> He uses the comparison to a road sign, specifically one with a silhouette of a deer. This road sign symbolizes the possible presence of deer in the area but the sign is not an actual deer. “The former is a sign referring to the latter, but in no way do the two co-inhere... [Deer and the sign have] only an external or nominal

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<sup>125</sup> *BCP*, 857.

<sup>126</sup> John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 4.

<sup>127</sup> Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 22-23.

relationship.”<sup>128</sup> Sacraments, on the other hand, are intimate and relational experiences of the Divine through sacred elements. They are not merely signs pointing towards something wholly other.

Macquarrie says that sacraments link two worlds or “the dualities under which the one world keeps appearing.”<sup>129</sup> A sacrament makes known the real presence of God. Macquarrie states, “I believe that if we are to arrive at an adequate understanding of sacramentality, we need to have a strong sense of the divine immanence.”<sup>130</sup> To understand sacramentality we must believe that God can be present and experienced through creation. “[W]hen we talk of a sacramental universe,” Macquarrie writes, “we are implying that God is not only a transcendent reality beyond the world he made, but an immanent reality who dwells within his world and is active in it.”<sup>131</sup> Thinkers like Origen, the early Church theologian, would likely not be able to accept the argument that the world holds the potentiality of sacrament. To Origen the universal Logos did not mean a “neutral presence of him in every created reason.”<sup>132</sup> Yet Balthasar critiques this view by saying that Origen’s understanding means there are limits to the Logos and that it can

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<sup>128</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 22.

<sup>129</sup> Macquarrie speaks of the two worlds in a variety of ways including: material and spiritual, secular and spiritual, natural and supernatural; *Guide to Sacraments*, 5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, Kindle ed. Translated by A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1964), chapter titled “Christian Universalism,” paragraph 9.

therefore not still be at work in and through creation.<sup>133</sup> Through this study of sacramentality, it will become clear that creation does hold the potential to be sacramental.

It may be helpful here to make the distinction that the Ancient Eastern Christian tradition makes between that of *energies* and *essence*. The tradition states that while we cannot see or experience the “essence” of God we can experience the “energy” of God through creation.<sup>134</sup> Basil the Great writes, “No-one has ever seen the essence of God, but we believe in the essence because we experience the energy.”<sup>135</sup> Sacramentality, in part, is the realized potential of the created world to be used as a means to experience the energy of God.

Reflecting on the Incarnation, Sheehy writes, “Thus the particular conveys the universal, and what is universal is rooted in what is particular. This appears to be a principle of God’s working with us.”<sup>136</sup> He goes on to argue that if the Incarnation overcomes the “polarity between the material and the spiritual” then the dualism that may once have been set before us can no longer stand. The sacred can be found within the created.<sup>137</sup> Particulars, not just human, but in all of creation including place, have sacramental potentiality. Brown echoes this by suggesting that seeing symbolic

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., chapter titled “Christian Universalism,” paragraph 11.

<sup>134</sup> John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 61.

<sup>135</sup> As cited in Inge, *Theology of Place*, 61.

<sup>136</sup> Sheehy, “Sacred Space and the Incarnation,” *Sacred Spaces: House of God, Gate of Heaven* eds. Philip North and John North (New York: Continuum, 2007), 16.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

geography and pilgrimage as two ways that generations of Christians have kept a sacramental view of place.<sup>138</sup> Leech writes, “But the whole point of the sacraments and of the setting apart of certain places as sacramental places is to enable us to make progress in that ability to see the whole world as sacramental. That ability does not come suddenly or easily.”<sup>139</sup> Holy places and the Church’s defined sacraments set humanity on a path to see God’s presence in the material.

When discussing sacraments, multiple theologians write on William Temple’s bold statement that Christianity is the most materialistic of religions.<sup>140</sup> Temple makes this claim based on three observations. First, Christianity places itself within a created, material world. Second, Christianity is materialistic because of the Incarnation. God became material when taking on flesh and becoming human. Lastly, Christianity is considered materialistic because of the practices within the Church. The sacraments are spiritual practices that embrace and make use of the material.<sup>141</sup> This alone is a case against a dualistic worldview, which pits material and spiritual against each other. Matter cannot be inherently bad if God uses it in the ways just mentioned.

This making use of the material is helpful for the discussion of the importance of place. Sheehy makes the argument, “If William Temple is right about the material and its high esteem in the Christian faith, the same must surely be true of place, for matter exists

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<sup>138</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 162.

<sup>139</sup> Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* Kindle ed. (Harrisburg, Pa: Morehouse Publishing, 1980), chapter 7, paragraph 3.

<sup>140</sup> Inge, *Theology of Place*, 64; Macquarrie, *Guide to Sacraments*, 6; and Jeremy Sheehy, “Sacred Space and the Incarnation,” 18.

<sup>141</sup> Macquarrie, *Guide to Sacraments*, 6.

in space, and if God is expressed in materiality He is also expressed in place (with the same theological strengths and weakness).”<sup>142</sup>

It is helpful to look at Philip Sheldrake’s work when studying the Eucharist and its relation to place. Sheldrake states, “To practice the Eucharist, to enter this space, implies a radical transformation of human location such that it is no longer to be centered on the individual ego but discovered in being (to borrow a classic phrase from Ignatian spirituality) a-person-for-others.”<sup>143</sup> The Eucharist offers the means to connect with the wider community, both present in the church and also across geographical and time boundaries. Living in a largely individualistic culture and seeking to find ways to become part of community requires sacraments like the Eucharist. Sheldrake echoes this with, “A sense of place is critical to human identity. The Eucharist is a ritual practice that ‘places’ us within a narrative wider than our individual and exclusive stories.”<sup>144</sup>

Boersma summarizes Henri de Lubac, “The two [Christ’s presence in the Eucharist and the Church as the body of Christ] necessarily go hand in hand...With only ‘virtual presence’ of Christ in the sacrament, one would end up with only a ‘virtual presence’ of Christ in the church, too.”<sup>145</sup> If Christ can be experienced in the sacraments, can he not also be experienced in any other aspect of the Church or in place? The Church is called to be the real body, thus holding the real presence of Christ. For place to be

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<sup>142</sup> Sheehy, “Sacred Space and the Incarnation,” 18.

<sup>143</sup> Philip Sheldrake, “Practicing Catholic ‘Place’: The Eucharist,” *Horizons* 28 no. 2 (Fall 2001) 172.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>145</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 107.

viewed as holding sacramental potentiality, first there needs to be the understanding that God is present in the sacraments.

As we have discussed before, an important element of being placed is relationships and community. God moves through the Eucharist in such a way that it provides for that community, connecting the receiver not only to God but to others.

As we see in the triune nature of God, God is relational. Sacraments, when showing forth God's energy, reveal this relational attribute of God. The Eucharist is a natural example of this relational attribute. First, the three persons of God are all involved in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Secondly, Eucharist is a communal meal for the recipients. I suggest that place holds the potential to direct humanity to the relational God too. An example may be participating in a cafe's "long table" dinner, where guests who do not know each other come and sit together to enjoy a meal together. It may be that through the joy and love of building relationships with neighbors that we also experience the energy of God's joy and love. This is not to say that a long-table meal is the same as the Eucharist, for I would argue that the Eucharist holds more graces. Even so, both meals hold the potential of revealing who God is to humanity and allowing God's energy to be experienced.

As seen through the example of Eucharist, one aspect of the sacraments is how they are relationship-building. Sacraments bring connections with God and with one another. Brian Horne writes:

All other things that are of God have God in them and he them in himself likewise...God hath his influence into the very essence of all things, without which influence of Deity supporting them their utter annihilation could not choose but follow. Of him all things have both received their first being and their continuance to be that which they are. All things therefore are partakers of God,

they are his offspring, his influence is in them, and the personal wisdom of God for that very cause is said to excel in nimbleness or agility, to pierce into all intellectual pure, and subtle spirits, to go through all, and to reach unto everything that is. Otherwise, how should the same wisdom be that which supporteth, beareth, sustained.<sup>146</sup>

All of creation, being made by God, is infused with God and has the potential to connect one to God. These connections go beyond just the two or seven sacraments as defined by the Church but extend to all of creation. All of Creation holds the potential to draw one towards God. The author of the Letter to the Romans states, “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.”<sup>147</sup> By holding the fingerprints of the creator, creation is able to reveal a God whose essence is hidden from us but whose energy is not. I will address some of the potential concerns of overstating the sacramental potentiality of creation in the last section of this chapter. For now, I will simply stress the distinction that creation is not the same as the Creator.

While Macquarrie, in his book on the Sacraments, focuses on the seven sacraments as defined primarily by the Roman Catholic Church, he advocates for the sacramental nature of all of creation. He states, “But the material world can become a way to God, joining us to [God] rather than cutting us off. It can become a door or channel of communication, through which [God] comes to us and we may go to [God].”<sup>148</sup> The implication of this is that humanity benefits greatly from being aware of

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<sup>146</sup> As cited by Inge in *Theology of Place*, 63; Brian Horne, “The Sacramental Use of Material Things,” *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1993).

<sup>147</sup> Romans 1:20 (NRSV).

<sup>148</sup> Macquarrie, *Guide to Sacraments*, 6.

its surroundings, and by doing so we open ourselves up to experiencing God. Macquarrie goes on to say that “[humanity’s] spiritual well-being demands that [they] should recognize and cherish the visible things of the world as things that are made by God and that provide access to God.”<sup>149</sup>

Understanding the sacraments more inclusively than just those defined by the church provides space for humanity to experience God more broadly. Brown writes, “A God active outside the control of the Church needs to be acknowledged, and the implications heeded.”<sup>150</sup> This is not to remove the Church from its role as the body of Christ, but to see that experiencing God is not limited to the Church. The set sacraments of the Church are gifts that allow us to experience God and relate communally, across time and space. Viewing place as potentially sacramental does not lessen the set sacraments of the Church or make them irrelevant. The set sacraments offer their own unique graces. The sacramentality of place is a different way that the energies of God can be experienced.

As I briefly touched on above, sacraments do more than connect the receiver to God but also connect humanity, one to another. One result of the Second Vatican Council is the shift to viewing the Church as a sacrament.<sup>151</sup> Not only does the Church connect one with God, but the Church connects one with another as God has designed humanity to be inter-connected. The church is not the only sacrament to do this, though. All seven sacraments join humanity one to another while also connecting humanity with God.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 2.

<sup>151</sup> Inge, *Theology of Place*, 61.

As I conclude the exploration of what a sacrament is, it is important to heed Inge's warning, "...we need to be clear that although God reveals [God's self] in the world, sacramentality does not mean that the world itself is self-revelatory of God in a general and indiscriminate manner. Rather, it means that the world in all its diverse aspects can be the place of God's own self-revelation to us."<sup>152</sup> Sacraments are materials that allow for revelation of God while binding humanity with God and with one another. Place, being made up of material in geography and community, holds this potential to be sacramental. Placedness allows for an awakening to sacramental potentiality. If the aspects of place hold the potentiality but humanity does not attach to place, the experience of God will not be actualized. Because the parts of place are material, they speak of the potentiality that place has to being that material where divine transcendence occurs. Inge summarizes this well by writing "...places are the seat of relations and of meeting and activity between God and the world."<sup>153</sup> Place is where God's energy can be experienced.

### **Incarnation and Sacramentality of Placedness**

To further understand sacrament and its relation to placedness, it is helpful to explore the Incarnation, a notion discussed above in Chapter Two. If part of being a sacrament means to bridge two worlds together, to connect humanity with God, then the Incarnation can be seen as the precursor to all sacraments. Wilson states, "In the incarnation (not the doctrine but the mystery-laden actuality of the one who is fully

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 68.

human and fully divine yet one person), God weaves together creation and redemption in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>154</sup> He goes on to write, “The Word became flesh not as an instrument toward our salvation but as an embrace of the whole of creation in this one person--an embrace that redeems all creation.”<sup>155</sup> The Incarnation binds the two worlds and also gives value to the material by taking on material being.

Multiple theologians refer to Jesus as the “primordial sacrament.”<sup>156</sup> Schillibeeckx writes, “the man Jesus, as the personal, visible realisation of the divine grace of redemption, is the sacrament, the primordial sacrament, because this man, the son of God himself, is intended to be in his humanity the only way to the actuality of redemption.”<sup>157</sup> Macquarrie, reflecting on Schillibeeckx, writes, “Jesus, in his humanity, was a visible, embodied, historical phenomenon within the world.”<sup>158</sup> He continues, “Christ we must recognize as a super-sacrament, a unique manifestation in visible form of the authentic life of God.”<sup>159</sup> Macquarrie argues that Christ is also the founder of all sacraments as nothing exists within the sacraments that are not first in Christ. He states that not only in the Eucharist but in all sacraments Christ is received.<sup>160</sup> “Christ is the content of the

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<sup>154</sup> Wilson, *God's Good Word*, 63.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> While multiple theologians attribute this to Edward Schillebeeckx, it appears that Carl Feckes was the first to use the term in 1934. Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 6; Inge, *Theology of Place*, 60; Macquarrie, *Guide to Sacraments*, 35.

<sup>157</sup> As cited by Inge in *Theology of Place*, 60.

<sup>158</sup> Macquarrie, *Guide to Sacraments*, 35.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

sacrament.”<sup>161</sup> To be sacramental is to come from Christ--the Word--and to connect with the God as Word.

All of this is significant to place because “Sacramentality is not simply an affirmation of the world as it is, but of the fact that Christ is in the world.”<sup>162</sup> The place and all that makes up place is full of sacramental potentiality and should be valued as such.

The Word made flesh -- the material body of Jesus -- is important because it is the ultimate in-breaking of God into creation. There are three ways to identify the body of Christ: historical, Eucharistic, and ecclesial.<sup>163</sup> God broke into the world and took on a body in a specific period of time in Jesus; God continues to be made real and present in the Eucharist; and God is also embodied within the Church. Boersma reminds his readers that these three are “sacramentally linked together.”<sup>164</sup> He goes on to discuss how the three forms of Christ’s body are intertwined. One over-simplified way to put it is, “You are what you eat.” By consuming the body of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church becomes the body of Christ.<sup>165</sup> Through every participation in the Eucharist, there is participation in all three aspects of the Body of Christ--historical, Eucharistic, and ecclesial. The participation means that Christ is made present again in these three specific ways.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>162</sup> Inge, *Theology of Place*, 76.

<sup>163</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 31; Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 115.

<sup>164</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 115.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

The mystery of the presence of God in sacraments has been lost in more recent years.<sup>166</sup> Rediscovery of a fuller meaning of sacrament will not only reaffirm the importance of the material but also make humanity more aware of the various ways God can be experienced. The body of Christ comes not to disconnect humanity from the rest of creation but brings restoration, including with creation, so that God is experienced more fully. Through the Eucharist, there is the reminder of redemption and God's presence in specific place.

Understanding Christ as the ultimate sacrament has implications for placedness. First, Christ is in humanity, thus humans hold the potential to be sacramental.<sup>167</sup> Just as the Incarnation--Christ taking on the material--opens the material to have sacramental potentiality, similarly the Incarnation--Christ becoming human--opens humanity to having sacramental potentiality. People are a key element of place and can have a sacramental presence in their place.

Secondly, Christ gives the example of intentional inhabitants. John Vincent writes:

First, there is the level of incarnation. We need to confirm ourselves in areas of need. If we are not there, a few of us need to move there. Second, there is the level of healing. We need people on the ground who will express love and compassion in the face of obvious injustice and victimization... We need people really committed to each other, to the place and to the disciplines necessary for significant acting.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> See Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 31-32, for an explanation of the evolution of understanding Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

<sup>167</sup> Inge, *Theology of Place*, 61.

<sup>168</sup> As cited in "Theology for Today's City," *Urban Theology: A Reader* ed. Michael Northcott (Herdon, VA: Cassell, 1998), 21.

As Christ became incarnate and dwelt among us, even in some of the grimmest places, so, too, may humanity be called. Being intentional about where one locates oneself, where one chooses to find placedness, may play a significant role in how we experience God. It is a call to be sacramentally present to the dark corners of this world that long for Christ's light to break forth, a concept to be discussed at greater length in the final chapter of this study. For now it is sufficient to say that Christ gives the example of how to be intentional in finding place and creating placedness.

Sacramental theology talks about the differences of the particular and the universal. The distinctions are helpful when exploring the sacramental potentiality in place. Sacraments are able to hold two realities together, that of the particular and the universal. The Incarnation is a helpful example of this. Sheldrake writes, "Incarnation anchors human experience of the sacred firmly in a world of particulars."<sup>169</sup> Inge agrees by stressing how the Incarnation shows the importance of the particular, with the example of place, for the Incarnation entered into the world in a particular place in a particular time.<sup>170</sup> Yet, while particular in that historical moment, Jesus is also universal being the Word, the primordial sacrament, and the Second Adam. By taking on flesh, Jesus becomes the universal.<sup>171</sup> Still, "Incarnation anchors human experience of the sacred firmly in a world of particulars."<sup>172</sup> Balthasar writes:

In becoming man Christ falls into the universal category of man, and so Paul's expression "found as a man" (Phil 2:7) implies an identity of nature persisting,

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<sup>169</sup> Sheldrake, "Practicing Catholic 'Place,'" 165.

<sup>170</sup> Inge, *Theology of Place*, 67.

<sup>171</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations*, see section 3 of "The Implications of the Word," paragraph 1.

<sup>172</sup> Sheldrake, "Practicing Catholic 'Place,'" 165.

regardless of the analogy conveyed by κένωσις [self-emptying], even in the greatest of his acts as God-man; and in this precisely consists the taking of man's nature into the unity of the God-man in order to redeem it.<sup>173</sup>

Christ as the primordial sacrament exemplifies both the particular and the universal nature of sacraments. A sacrament is particular because it occurs in a particular time and place. It is also universal because it carries the energy of God which is universal and unchanging. Leech writes:

The sacramental presence of Christ in the powerful and concentrated form of the Holy Sacrament does not mean that we are denying his presence elsewhere. The particular does not deny the universal, nor the universal the particular, and we need to re-emphasize the real and particular presence of Christ in the church building, consecrated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit and containing the Eucharistic Bread of the Presence.<sup>174</sup>

Sacraments combine the universal and the particular into one. Yet, there is tension between the universal and the particular. Sheldrake states, "Thus, in theology there is an inevitable tension between the local and universal dimensions of place. Within every particular there is an impulse toward the universal, or toward 'catholicity.'"<sup>175</sup>

This discussion of particular is currently important as Sheehy argues, "Our age tends, I think, to distrust particularity and to prize the general, the universal."<sup>176</sup> To be placed is to combat the general and universal extreme. To be placed is to come back to the middle where both the universal and particular are in balance. While recognizing the universal aspects of life, to be placed, one must be aware of the particular. To be placed

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<sup>173</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations*, see section 3 of "The Implications of the Word," paragraph 3.

<sup>174</sup> Leech, *True Prayer*, see chapter 7, paragraph 3.

<sup>175</sup> Sheldrake, "Practicing Catholic 'Place,'" 163.

<sup>176</sup> Sheehy, "Sacred Space and the Incarnation," 12.

means to find oneself within the particular, attached to a particular community in a particular geographical location while also part of something larger and universal. A helpful distinction is that while God is universally present, God is experienced in the particulars.

Sheldrake writes, “Any theology of place must engage unequivocally with particularity. The medieval Franciscan, Duns Scotus, offers a highly developed theology of particularity. All things in their very particularity participate directly in the life of the Creator.”<sup>177</sup> Sacraments require particulars. For place to be sacramental, its particulars must be acknowledged and experienced.

### **Sacramental Creation. Sacramental Place.**

Based on the above argument, it can be affirmed that Christian theology holds a positive view of the material world. Because of this, it can then be asked if creation, and specifically place, beyond the set sacraments of the Church, can be seen as sacred.

Sheldrake writes, “A Christian way of viewing the world suggests that no part of the world is inherently profane although it may be profaned by human actions. ‘The sacred’ is materialised in a variety of ways, of which built environments are one example.”<sup>178</sup>

Creation, even what humanity builds and develops, has the potential of being sacred.

Provan makes the statement, “Creation is not divine, but it is sacred.”<sup>179</sup> It is important to stress that when we talk about the sacramentality of creation, we do not

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<sup>177</sup> Sheldrake, “Practicing Catholic ‘Place,’” 164.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>179</sup> Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 31.

confuse that notion with the idea that creation is divine. That would lead us to idolatry. This may be best done by keeping in mind the distinction between creation and its creator. Creation is not in itself divine but carries a piece of the maker--the divine--within and is thus able to point creation towards the creator.

Sacramental creation is not only a pointing towards the Creator but is an actual dance with the Creator. There is a participation with the Creator as the created. Boersma writes, "A sacramental ontology insists that not only does the created world point to God as its source and 'point of reference,' but that it also subsists or participates in God."<sup>180</sup> He continues by saying "our being participates in the being of God."<sup>181</sup> For Boersma, this is the meaning of the Acts passage: "In him we live and move and have our being."<sup>182</sup>

Boersma supports the claim that the created world is not independent of, or disconnected from, its Creator and the Godly realm. Boersma uses a Platonist-Christian synthesis to support his argument, not to show that the two are interchangeable but to explore how Christianity shares some common elements with Plato's philosophy. For example, both views see that there is a world beyond this world, which is more complete than the current form. Boersma sees the created world as temporal and lesser good, but good nonetheless.<sup>183</sup> Boersma quotes the Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, "The world was created as the 'matter,' the material of one all-embracing

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<sup>180</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 24.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Acts 17:28 (NRSV).

<sup>183</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 6-7.

Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of the cosmic sacrament.”<sup>184</sup> All of creation has the potential to be sacramental, used by God to reveal God’s self. Yet, it is a potential that is not fully met at present. Creation is not automatically sacramental because, either by human sin or human ignorance, the potential is not always realized. Boersma quotes Schmemmann:

Christ came not to *replace* “natural” matter with some “supernatural” and sacred matter, but to restore it and to fulfill it as the means of communion with God. The holy water in Baptism, the bread and wine in the Eucharist, stand for, i.e. *represent* the whole of creation, but creation as it will be at the *end*, when it will be consummated in God, when He will fill all things with Himself.<sup>185</sup>

Creation’s potential to be the doorway through which God is experienced will not be fully realized until the eschaton. Yet in the present we begin to experience glimpses of the potential realized. Water, bread and wine, all ordinary earthly substances are examples of those doorways. Boersma writes, “In baptism and Eucharist we witness the restoration of matter to its original function.”<sup>186</sup> Within and through the sacraments, we gain sight of the world as it is meant to be.

All of creation holds that ability be experienced as sacred. Boersma offers two suggestions for how to properly celebrate the created world as sacred. First, the created world “does not exist in itself and for itself” but is from the Creator.<sup>187</sup> Second, it is “Predicated on its participatory status.”<sup>188</sup> Experiencing the true nature of any sacrament

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 9; Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 49.

<sup>186</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 9.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 31.

is dependent upon relationality with God. Boersma points to how Adam did not follow these two ways of being part of creation as human. Adam did not recognize the sacramental potential that creation held. Instead Adam reduced creation to a “purely material reality.”<sup>189</sup> Boersma argues that, “The temporal, created order has its ultimate end not in itself but in the mysterious reality [meaning Triune God] that transcends it.”<sup>190</sup> It is inherent in creation to have sacramental potentiality.

Yet, while it is inherent, it is not constant. It is neither always apparent nor always the same for each receiver. Brown writes, “It is not that God speaks only in one way through the natural order but that significantly different types of experience tend to come to prominence in different epochs.”<sup>191</sup> Sacramental experiences take place in the particulars. If humanity does not place itself within the particulars, the experiences will be lost. Humanity must be present with creation to allow creation to be that medium through which God reveals God’s self.

Balthasar explains that nature is in “active readiness, the expression of true essence of creatureliness, for every possible initiative on the part of God’s will without at the same time anticipating it.” He continues, “This readiness was taken up and fulfilled by Christ, which shows exactly what analogy here means.”<sup>192</sup> Creation holds the potential to be sacramental. If it were not so, the Incarnation would not have been possible. It is the

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>191</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 153.

<sup>192</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations*, section 3 of “The Implications of the Word,” paragraph 6.

movements of God and the readiness of humanity that transform the potential into actuality.

It can be argued that it is not only creation--in its unadulterated form--that can be sacramental in its nature, but also that what has been co-created--or built by human hands--can be the doorway to God. Baptism and Eucharist are useful examples here. Baptismal water, more or less, stays in the same form as it was given to us by the Creator. Bread and wine, on the other hand, are elements of creation--given to us by God--but made into their current forms through the work of human hands. Items built or made by humanity can also be means through which God is experienced. Brown, in his book *God and Enchantment of Place*, goes to great lengths to show how artwork can be more than symbols of truth but can be sacraments, revealing God.<sup>193</sup>

As we continue to look further at place, it is important to remember that place, even that which holds mainly human-adapted creation, has the potentiality of being experienced as sacramental. Brown views all of place with “the possibility that any and every place that has a human imprint on it may actually have the potential to function sacramentally.”<sup>194</sup>

Many may find it easy to experience the sacredness of creation when viewing a star-filled sky or majestic mountains. Yet, the majority of the world lives in urban environments where it initially may be harder to experience the sacraments surrounding

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<sup>193</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

humanity.<sup>195</sup> There are multiple theologians who are addressing the sacredness found in urban settings.<sup>196</sup> Sheldrake advocates for urban development that recognizes the transcendence that can be found in cities over and against the utilitarian mindset that is mainly concerned with profit and ease. He writes, “If cities are to reinforce a sense that human life is sacred rather than merely an organic phenomenon, they must embrace all dimensions of human existence--functional, ethical and spiritual.”<sup>197</sup> He continues to challenge his readers by asking, “Are we building into cities what is precious to us? Cities have always been powerful symbols of how we understand and construct community. Yet, the Modernist planning and architecture that still dominates many Western cities evokes neither the value of individual people nor focused community.”<sup>198</sup> If place encourages, rather than hinders, the sacramental presence, then intentional urban planning should be valued. The document “The Cities: A Methodist Report” challenges its readers by arguing:

But a spirituality of the city must precede an elaborated theology; it is only when we are moved by the sheer diversity of the city that we feel deeply the experience of God’s grace unconditionally among us. That experience creates a new kind of spirituality, which in turn seeks a new kind of theological understanding. If the universe has a human face, then so must the city.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> As of 2018, 55% of the world’s population lives in cities. This figure is expected to jump to 68% by 2050. United Nations  
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html> (accessed Feb 22, 2019).

<sup>196</sup> Northcott, “Introduction” in *Theology in the City*; “Theology for Today’s City” in *Theology of the City*; Philip Sheldrake, “Placing the Sacred: Transcendence and the City.” *Literature and Theology* 21 no. 3 (Sep 2007): 243-258.

<sup>197</sup> Sheldrake, “Placing the Sacred,” 244.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>199</sup> “Theology for Today’s City,” *The Cities: A Methodist Report* (London: NCH Action for Children, 1997), 21.

The local environment can play a role in individual and communal spirituality. This spirituality then shapes the theology, ethics, and worldview of the community. Being intentional about how place is developed and experienced will shape much more than just the architecture of a building; more profoundly, it will shape how humanity lives and relates.

I will address the implications of Sheldrake's claim and, more generally, the topic of urban planning and place development further in chapter five. For now it is important to simply note that particulars, such as buildings and city parks, help or hinder the ways in which sacramental potentiality can be experienced. This is especially important when viewing local place. It is not just the architecture and geographic planning but also community development that is important as relationships also hold sacramental potentiality. Just as the relationship the believer has with Christ is important in Eucharist, relationship is important in all sacramental experiences.<sup>200</sup> Inge explains this well by showing how a person can be physically close to a stranger but because there is no relationship between them, while they are present, the presence of one has no effect on the other.<sup>201</sup> Inge writes, "The world in itself is not sacramental, because sacramentality is an event that involves action by God and a response by unique human beings."<sup>202</sup> For something to be sacramental, relationship is required.

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<sup>200</sup> Inge, *Theology of Place*, 79.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

Inge writes: “And place is central to [sacramental] experiences since they are glimpses of a destination that we shall never fully know until we reach it.”<sup>203</sup> To see place as sacramental requires seeing it as something more than utility and requires relationship. The energy of God can be experienced through place, both what has been created by God and what has been co-created by humanity.

There are extremes of either seeing place as void of God or God in itself. The middle is where place holds the potential of being sacred. Swinging too far one way or the other can lead humanity astray. There needs to be a balance. Understanding that place has the potential to be sacramental may become a fine line with idolatry not too far off. Boersma argues that we are to be heavenly focused and yet “heavenly participation means that life on earth takes on a heavenly dimension.”<sup>204</sup> The balance comes from recognizing the Divine in the sacred but not seeing the sacred as Divine. We worship the God we encounter through creation but we do not worship creation itself. Brown writes:

What is important in all of this is the way in which the biblical writers are wrestling with the question of how God’s blessing will be realized within the specificity of a particular time and place. That is one reason why the Hebrew notion of peace refuses to confine the word to purely internal or interpersonal relations but also insists on the totality of a changed environment.<sup>205</sup>

All of creation holds the potential of being blessed, of shalom being found within, of God being experienced. All of creation is potentially sacramental. Because all of creation has the potential to be sacramental, and because sacraments require particularities, it can be

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>204</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 5.

<sup>205</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 156.

concluded that place, as a particular, holds the potential to be sacred. It is part of the Church's call to ask how this potentiality within place can be realized.

I will conclude this chapter with a few final words from Boersma, "It is through the Eucharistic celebration, therefore, that the church herself becomes a sacrament of the eschatological reality of the fullness of Christ...In Christ, God's eternal present enters into the world, so that past, present, and future come together sacramentally in the 'time of the church.'"<sup>206</sup> Creation is given the gift of being both the material through which God reveals God's self and the receiver of the revelations; as a result, relationships deepen. Because sacraments require particular--not just universal--material, it can be asked what are those particulars through which God can be experienced. I offer that just as bread and wine are particulars, so to can place be a particular where God can be present.

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<sup>206</sup> Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 189.

## Chapter Four

### Other Mandates for Placedness

As I showed in the previous two chapters, there is a Christian argument for the importance of place. By showing that there is a Biblical and theological precedent for place, I hope to have dispelled any concerns that this study is simply a reaction to current counter-trends in American culture. It is true that there is a growing movement that supports the local. One example is the “buy local” movement that supports keeping the majority of economic circulations localized. There is “Small Business Saturday” which is the day after Black Friday. It is a movement to help to keep small businesses alive in the face of companies like Amazon and Walmart. The local trend can also be seen in the increase in farmers markets, an alternative to chain grocery stores. The United States Department of Agriculture has noted a 76% increase in registered farmers markets between 2008 and 2014.<sup>207</sup> The number increased another 2.3% in the following year indicating a continued growing trend.<sup>208</sup>

The current *think local* trends expand beyond economics into other areas such as environmentalism. When driving through the hills of central Pennsylvania, one sees signs saying “You’re entering the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.” Some of these signs are more than two hundred miles away from the northern end of the bay, yet they remind residents

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<sup>207</sup> United State Department of Agriculture  
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2014/08/04/new-data-reflects-continued-demand-farmers-markets> (accessed on Feb 22, 2019).

<sup>208</sup> Sustainable Food Trust  
<https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/farmers-markets-america/> (accessed on Feb 22, 2019).

and tourists of the local ecosystem and with its interconnection with a larger community. Essentially, the intention of these signs is to remind people they are connected to a specific ecosystem and what they do matters to this specific place.

The conversation around place can also be found in the academy. According to a 2011 study done by Maria Lewicka, over the past 40 years there has been a growing increase in the study of place across disciplines. Everything from environmental psychology to urban studies, gerontology to tourism, even medicine, has taken a look at the impact of place. These studies have contributed to more than 400 papers being published in 120 different journals. While the conversation has been ongoing for almost a half a century, most journal articles have been written since the mid-1990s.<sup>209</sup> Terms like “social capital”, “place attachment”, and “place identity” are becoming common in these disciplines.<sup>210</sup> Such changes highlight the importance of place, and slowly, change is occurring.

There is a unique role that the church and other faith communities can play in this place-dialogue. This is especially true in the USA. In the USA a significant percentage of citizens gather regularly for some type of spiritual meeting. According to Robert D. Putnam, in 1980, 62 percent of the population aligned themselves to some formal religious organization and between 35 and 40 percent participated regularly in a congregation. This is a higher percentage than in most other Western countries.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Maria Lewicka, “Place attachment: How far have we come in the last 40 years?” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 31 (2011), 207.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>211</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 65-66.

Putnam writes, “Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.”<sup>212</sup> Putnam has found that “nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context. So how involved we are in a religion today matters a lot for America’s social capital.”<sup>213</sup> I argue that increased social capital means an increase in health to the local community. A healthy community contributes to a sense of placedness. Religious communities may be one of the central keys to increasing the sense of place within local communities.

I will argue in this chapter that parts of North America (and beyond) are re-evaluating the importance of place in the midst of a society that is generally seen as universal and nomadic. I will look specifically at the conversations within the social sciences and environmental communities and explore where those conversations can intersect with the Church. I will also include a few discussion points around social justice and government as they both are greatly impacted by a strong sense of place. This is to show that parts of the secular community are also recommending a renewed sense of place for the well-being of its inhabitants and the environment. This secular mandate for placedness is very much in line with what Christian living seeks.

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

## Social Sciences and Place

One main way that sociology studies place is through social capital. “Social capital” is a term originated by L. J. Hanifan in 1916. He writes,

...those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit...The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself...If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of *social capital*, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbors.<sup>214</sup>

Social capital is a way to quantify the importance of human interconnections that benefit both the individual and the community. Prior to the use of this term, there were two main ways to identify capital: physical and human.<sup>215</sup> For example, a college education is an example of human capital whereas a computer is physical capital. Just as physical and human capital are ways to quantify value, social capital recognizes that relationships also hold value. Social capital, as much as physical and human capital, can be the networking that helps one obtain a job. Relationships can provide care for an individual when sick. Social capital also provides a sense of belonging and increases one’s mental wellbeing. Petzold summarizes social capital by saying it is “a resource that is beneficial for one’s individual status within society.”<sup>216</sup> He goes on to state that social capital not only

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<sup>214</sup> As cited by Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19. Emphasis added.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>216</sup> Jan Petzold “Limitations and Opportunities of Social Capital for Adaptation to Climate Change: A Case Study on the Isles of Scilly” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 182, No. 2 (June 2016), 124.

benefits the individual but the community, being a “collective good.”<sup>217</sup> Social capital impacts an entire community.

Putnam has offered some of the foundational work on social capital. His work focused on the United States and found that “[b]etween 1973 and 1994 the number of men and women who took *any* leadership role in *any* local organization--from ‘old-fashioned’ fraternal organizations to new age encounter groups--was sliced by more than 50 percent.”<sup>218</sup> One example of this change to social capital is a loss of trust, respect, and communication. This has led to a significant increase in litigation. Putnam writes,

In some respects, this development [an increase in lawyers] may be one of the most revealing indicators of the fraying in our social fabric. For better or worse, we rely increasingly -- we are forced to rely increasingly--on formal institutions, and above all on the law, to accomplish what we used to accomplish through informal networks reinforced by generalized reciprocity--that is, through social capital.<sup>219</sup>

Putnam shows that the change to social capital has impacted many areas of human life.

To study social capital, Putnam looked at how much people engaged in organized, institutional communal activities that would provide social capital, such as clubs and religious gatherings. Putnam also studied more organic ways of relating with one another. For instance, he noticed that people invite others over to their homes less often, go out for dinner with friends less frequently, and are involved in fewer leisure activities. The lack of these activities diminish overall engagement with others.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 125. In this study, Petzold shows how the level of social capital impact a community's ability to respond to climate change.

<sup>218</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 60.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 115. Putnam uses the example of league bowling as a casual form of social capital. This explains the title, *Bowling Alone*.

Putnam argues throughout his book that the decline in social capital not only affects the individual but also the larger population. He shows that there has been a marked decline in civic participation. For instance, there has been a significant decline in voting in presidential elections since voting peaked in 1960.<sup>221</sup> This mirrors other noticeable social capital declines, which seem to have all started around the same time.

Civic participation has also decreased in other ways. While there has been an increase in the number of voluntary associations, there has been a decrease in the average membership of each of these groups. Putnam writes, “The organizational eruption between the 1960s and the 1990s represented a proliferation of letterheads, not a boom of grassroots participation.”<sup>222</sup> These associations are generally not localized and do not do much in the way of creating social capital. Most of these new groups do not have local community offices but are headquartered in areas with larger populations, many in the nation’s capital. Groups are no longer about creating grassroots change but rather are about impacting policy makers.<sup>223</sup>

Putnam goes to great lengths to study different statistics to find the reasons behind these marked changes. He does remind his readers to take these conclusions carefully and it is important to remember that correlation does not equal causation. Even so, these findings are helpful to quantify and analyze the changes to social capital within the USA and how that impacts society.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 31-32. Putnam’s data is up through the 1996 election and takes into account the Voting Rights Act of the 1960s. Since 2004 there has been a slight increase but it is still lower than 1992’s percentages. On the other hand, most recent midterm elections have shown a marked increase.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

Putnam finds that the overall decline in social engagement stretches across most demographics, including race, geographic location, and educational levels.<sup>224</sup> For instance, Putnam has found that while education once was a marker for social engagement and civic duties, it is not so anymore. Even though there has been a significant increase in overall levels of education, there has been a marked decrease in social engagement overall.<sup>225</sup>

Putnam attributes, in part, changes in social capital to time, location, and financials. Time and financial pressures do contribute to around ten percent of the decrease in social engagement.<sup>226</sup> Putnam found that overall in the last five decades, there has been no significant general decline in free time.<sup>227</sup> For one thing, Putnam found that those who are employed are more likely to be active in civil and social activities. In fact, those who work longer hours are statistically more likely to be more engaged civically.<sup>228</sup> This counters the idea that those who are the busiest are the least likely to be socially engaged, thus only contributing to a small percentage of the reason for the disengagement.

Putnam also found that location plays a role in social capital. First, those who perceive that they will be living in an area for less than five years are less likely to

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 190. Putnam does not account for possible changes in “perceived free time.”

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 191.

become engaged. The sense of limited time discourages putting down roots, finding a church, joining a club, or volunteering.<sup>229</sup>

Another ten percent of the overall decrease in social capital can be attributed to suburban sprawl.<sup>230</sup> The required time for commuting is one of the variables in this that makes social engagement harder. Sprawl also weakens community attachment. Work, home, school, shopping, and church can all be in different directions. There is less connection and interaction with neighbors when this happens.<sup>231</sup> Sprawl also increases social segregation making it less likely to have diverse social capital.<sup>232</sup> Putnam writes, “Thus the decline in social connectedness over the last third of the twentieth century might be attributable to the continuing eclipse of small-town America.”<sup>233</sup> Even so, Putnam does also take note that even in small towns, social capital has decreased.<sup>234</sup>

Putnam contributes twenty-five percent of the social capital decline to television watching. There is a marked correlation in the increase in television watching with a decrease in social engagement.<sup>235</sup> Putnam writes, “Both in this country and abroad, heavy television viewers are (even controlling for other demographic factors) significantly less likely to belong to voluntary associations and to trust other people. As TV ownership and

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 214. Putnam advocates for diversity in social capital. See “bridging social capital” later in this chapter.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 228.

usage spread across populations, it was linked, both in this country and abroad, to reduced contacts with relatives, friends, neighbors.”<sup>236</sup> Putnam also found that the casual relationships that increase organic social engagement have decreased because of televisions. People are inside their own homes more. There is less time spent out on the front porch, taking the dog for a walk, or cleaning up the front yard. These activities are venues where casual interactions with neighbors once took place.<sup>237</sup>

The data used in *Bowling Alone* is almost twenty years old. It is not hard to imagine that the increase in internet usage and “Netflix binge watching” has only increased the social disengagement of American society. Putnam also wrote this book before the introduction of the smartphone. Now, screen viewing is even more prevalent and is likely to have a great impact on the demise of social capital despite the occasions when people find themselves surrounded by others. For example, at the time of his writing, Putnam observed that time on public transport can increase engagement with others, increasing social capital. Now with smartphones, even when people are a city bus they remain isolated.

Putnam and other scholars make a helpful distinction between two types of social capital. It can be argued that some types of social capital, and the community groups that build social capital, are less than desirable. For instance, a white-supremacist group would qualify as a local community-based group that provides significant relationships for the acquiring of social capital. Yet a group like this does so at the exclusion of parts of the larger community and is counter to the Biblical mandate to *love thy neighbor*.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

Putnam labels two types of social capital, “bridging” and “bonding.”<sup>238</sup> Bridging social capital comes from heterogeneous groups. The diversity of these groups *bridges* people and their resources with others who are different from themselves. Bonding groups on the other hand are homogeneous. The KKK would be an unhealthy example of such a group. There are also many helpful and supportive bonding groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or a military veterans community. Putnam writes:

Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women’s reading groups, and fashionable country clubs. Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations.<sup>239</sup>

It is easy to think of homogeneous groups. The services these groups provide often works in part because of their focus. Many of them have positive effects on the individual and the larger community. Yet these groups have their limits. On the other hand, bridging social capital means that the resources available are now much broader because of the diversity of the group. Putnam concludes, “Bonding social capital is, as Xavier de Souza Briggs puts it, good for ‘getting by,’ but bridging social capital is crucial for ‘getting ahead.’”<sup>240</sup>

While bridging social capital brings greater resources to the individual and the community, it is not easy to achieve. This does not mean that it should not be sought

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 21-23.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 22. See also Petzold, “Limitations and Opportunities of Social Capital,” 124-125.

<sup>240</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 23. While local churches can easily become “bonding social capital,” I will argue in the last chapter that to be truly a placed parish, a church should seek ways to be more bridging.

after, but that special care and intentionality must go into forming relationships that facilitate bridging. Bonding communities may also be judged. Putnam writes, “Therefore it is important to ask how the positive consequences of social capital--mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness--can be maximized and the negative manifestations -- sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption--minimized.”<sup>241</sup> It should be asked if the inclusive nature of bonding groups is truly beneficial for the group and the larger community.

As Putnam takes the results of his studies and expresses why he advocates for a new-found increase in social capital, he notices changing worldviews. For example, he notes that a healthy community can challenge the materialistic way much of American society lives. Beatley echoes this in *Native to Nowhere*, “Genuine communities challenge prevailing assumptions about happiness in the modern age.”<sup>242</sup> It is also important to note that when involved in bridging communities, an individual will be exposed to a larger variety of experiences and views, thus reshaping one’s own worldview. By being part of diverse groups, perceived fears and distrust that may dissipate, leading to higher bridging social capital and increase placedness. Throughout *Bowling Alone*, Putnam correlates a decrease in community life embeddedness in American society with a decrease in social capital.<sup>243</sup> Putnam advocates for work towards increasing social capital, which requires a renewal to community life engagement, an essential aspect of placedness .

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>242</sup> Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 6.

<sup>243</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 275.

Sociologists have also looked at place attachment, finding that it has some similarities to social capital but is more focused on a geographical area. Place attachment describes the connection one has with a location. While place attachment is initially about one's attachment to a residence, it can extend to places such as vacation locations and workspace.<sup>244</sup>

A long quote by philosopher E. S. Casey expresses well both the change and continuity in humanity's connection to place:

Still more saliently, certain devastating phenomena of this century bring with them, by aftershock as it were, a revitalized sensitivity to place. Precisely in its capacity to eliminate all perceptible places from a given region, a prospect of nuclear annihilation heightens awareness of the unreplaceability of these places, their singular configuration and unrepeatable history. Much the same is true for any disruptive event that disturbs the placidity of cities and neighborhoods. Perhaps most crucially, the encroachment of an indifferent sameness-of-place on a global scale to the point when at times you cannot be sure which city you are in, given the overwhelming architectural and commercial uniformity of many cities makes the human subject long for a diversity of places, that is, difference-of-place, that has been lost in a worldwide monoculture based on Western (and more specifically, American) economic and political paradigms. This is not just a matter of nostalgia. An active desire for the particularity of place for what is truly "local" or "regional" is aroused by such increasingly common experiences. Place brings with it the very elements sheared off in the planiformity of site: identity, character, nuance.<sup>245</sup>

It is the loss of place and the fear of losing place that has made place more valuable and desired. With the increase in mobility and sameness, there is an ongoing draw towards the sense of being rooted in a place of significance, whether that significance be communal or individual.

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<sup>244</sup> Lewicka, "Place attachment," 209.

<sup>245</sup> As cited by Lewicka, "Place attachment," 209.

Lewicka writes that “sense of place is a natural condition of human existence... an invariant in a changing world.”<sup>246</sup> While geographical and communal variables change, which can impact attachment, the desire for attachment remains the same.<sup>247</sup> Lewicka goes on to state that “not only have places not lost their meaning but their importance in the contemporary world actually may have grown” in spite of an increase in detachment and mobility.<sup>248</sup> Similarly, Kunstler claims, “we want to feel that we truly belong to a specific part of the world.”<sup>249</sup> Social sciences point to the continued importance of place.

There are some interesting findings that Lewicka makes about place attachment. First, the size of the community does not play a significant role in place attachment; neither in general does whether the community is gated or opened. Lewicka concludes from her studies that “Socio-economic diversity of neighborhoods thus contributed to a decline in place attachment of both high and low status groups.”<sup>250</sup> Based on some of her research, she argues for less diversity. Yet this seems to contradict what Putnam advocates for when addressing bonding and bridging social capital. It seems to me that place attachment can be achieved in diverse communities if other factors--such as increased trust and mutuality--are addressed. The isolation that Lewicka appears to advocate for is not the only solution.

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> As cited by Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 166.

<sup>250</sup> Lewicka, “Place attachment,” 210.

There has been much work on city planning that is pertinent to the discussion of place. Brown, from his review of *Geography of Nowhere*, speaks to how city planning has been, at times, done poorly. He argues that the explosive expansion of cities and surrounding areas often happened in such a way as to demonstrate little to no thought as to how the parts affect the whole.<sup>251</sup> One example is that the automobile has led to the overall demise of public transportation.<sup>252</sup> This can be seen in stark contrast to other places where city planning included expansion of public transport and safer pedestrian and bike options. For example in Hasselt, Belgium, the city began to offer free public transport along with increasing bike and pedestrian lanes. As a result, the city's use of public transport has increased by almost 900 percent.<sup>253</sup> Not only does mass car usage increase road congestion and pollution, it also decreases those casual interactions that can increase social capital. This is to say nothing of the fact that with poor public transportation the economically disadvantaged are further oppressed.

Those living in poverty should also be considered in the designing of affordable housing. Not only should there be significant affordable housing available, but it should be designed with intentionality that extends beyond utility. Brown writes with a UK lens that can be translated easily to American city planning as well. He argues that in the UK, council estates can be more damaging than the impoverished places in the cities from which council estate residents had been removed. He attributes this to the loss of

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<sup>251</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 165.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 112.

community.<sup>254</sup> Often the long-established poor urban communities have large networks and social capital set up. When moving to newly planned housing, these networks are often disrupted and lost.

Brown advocates a set of elements for good city structure: intentional planning, mediated social interaction, and a sense of history.<sup>255</sup> Brown also advocates good architecture. He explains there is a need for more vertical depth to architecture. Often buildings are designed for the horizontal or utilitarian needs but forget the spiritual, the element that draws people to seeing beyond the created world to something greater. Brown goes on to argue that this is as much the case for church buildings as secular design.<sup>256</sup> Brown argues that cities have the chance to be sacramental even though this possibility is often ignored in city planning. He writes, “Cities are more than just the sum of the individuals who happen to live there. Buildings and the layout of cities can also help initiate experience of God.”<sup>257</sup> The spirituality of a place should be part of the consideration when planning for a wholistic city.

Richard Rogers, an architect, echoes this critique of the utilitarian approach by writing:

The essential problem is that cities have been viewed in instrumental or consumerist terms. Those responsible for them have tended to see it as their role to design cities to meet private material needs, rather than foster public life. The result is that cities have been polarised into communities of rich and poor and segregated into ghettos of single minded activity -- the business park, the Housing Estate, the residential suburb -- or worse still, into giant single function buildings

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<sup>254</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 159.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-183.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177.

like Shopping Centres with their own private streets (which lead nowhere) built in. ... We are witnessing the destruction of the very idea of the city.<sup>258</sup>

Good city planning requires a vision beyond the utilitarian toward the communal. City planning has the opportunity to either establish or tear down a sense of place.

Timothy Beatley also addresses city planning in *Native to Nowhere*. Even in urban contexts, Beatley argues for self-containing communities, where one's needs can be met within walking distance.<sup>259</sup> He names this use of place as "mixing land use."<sup>260</sup> Beatley is a big advocate for local stores where neighbors shop together in a local setting. This is in contrast to large box stores where people from a larger area travel farther distances to come and shop. They likely will not meet anyone they know while shopping because of the size and distance.<sup>261</sup> Beatley also discusses how schools could be at the center of the local community and be the hub for the community, with a variety of services and activities. This, too, would ideally be walkable for most residents.<sup>262</sup> Beatley looks to bring that "small town USA" experience to urban context through intentional, localized planning. Future planning should be done in a way that encourages connection to place, both geographically and communally.

The different sociological studies that consider both social and geographic place can provide the Church with useful knowledge. These insights can help guide the Church in both explaining current culture and also planning into the future. For instance, Putnam

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<sup>258</sup> As cited by Inge, *Theology of Place*, 19-20.

<sup>259</sup> Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 83.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-96.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

is able to show that the same decline in social engagement that much of North America has experienced over the past half a century mirrors the decline in church engagement and membership. He writes that “Americans have become about ten percent less likely to claim church membership, while our actual attendance and involvement in religious activities has fallen by roughly twenty-five to fifty percent.”<sup>263</sup> While many people still identify as Christian and are officially connected to a local church, the actual engagement within the church community has decreased significantly. This may mean that more time should be spent on encouraging engagement of members than time spent on bringing in new members.

Even with this decline, Putnam believes the church and other religious communities can play an important role in increasing social capital. He writes:

Churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment. Religiously active men and women learn to give speeches, run meetings, manage disagreements, and bear administrative responsibility. They also befriend others who are in turn likely to recruit them into other forms of community activity. In part for these reasons, churchgoers are substantially more likely to be involved in secular organizations, to vote and participate politically in other ways, and to have deeper informal social connections.<sup>264</sup>

Putnam also writes:

[R]eligion is today, as it has traditionally been, a central fount of American community life and health. Faith-based organizations serve civic life both directly, by providing social support to their members and social services to the wider community, and indirectly, by nurturing civic skills, inculcating moral values, encouraging altruism, and fostering civic recruitment among church people.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 72.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Many sociologists believe that the Church can have a vital role in increasing social capital. The Church can and should enter into conversation around the importance of place with the social sciences, not only to understand it but to increase social capital and place attachment in ways that mutually seek greater placedness.

Social capital is very much about relationships, something for which the Church also strongly advocates.<sup>266</sup> Place attachment speaks of the importance of specific place and the human connection with it, something that I have shown to be encouraged throughout scripture and theology. City planning has the potential to see ways to provide for a community's wholistic needs, not simply its most basic utilitarian needs. The conversations about community among sociologists could well inform such conversations among Christians: there are many points of cross-dialogue where all can benefit from each other's perspectives, values, and ideas for growth and service.

### **Environment and Place**

As Timothy Beatley stresses the importance of place for urban community planning, he goes beyond stating why it is important for humanity to express the impact it has on the environment. He writes, "Without intimate contact with real places, there is little chance that the loss of environments and the practice of unsustainable patterns of consumption and resource exploitation will be reversed."<sup>267</sup> Humanity is intimately tied up with the environment, whether we like to recognize it or not. Humanity's sense of place both impacts and is impacted by the surrounding environment. In this section I will

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<sup>266</sup> In the last chapter, I will explore further the importance of relationships within the Church.

<sup>267</sup> Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 3.

review a select scholarship that considers the relationship between the environment and place.

In Kathryn Colley and Tony Craig's recent article "Natural Places: Perceptions of Wilderness and Attachment to Local Greenspace," the authors set out to discover the "the role of perceived wildness in attachment to the everyday green/blue environments that serve as important resources for local communities."<sup>268</sup> In their background research, they found there had been little scientific conversation around how local natural spaces--found in and around cities and towns--affect place attachment. They write, "These places are arguably more vulnerable to change and more likely to be contested e.g. due to development pressure, impacts of neighbouring land uses, and conflicts of use."<sup>269</sup> Colley and Craig's hypothesis is "that relationships between perceived wildness and place attachment would be moderated by factors relating to individuals' relationship[s] and experience[s] with nature as a whole."<sup>270</sup> For Colley and Craig, this study is important, in part, due to the fact that "[p]lace attachments, like interpersonal attachments, can develop out of the fulfilment of psychological needs such as those for comfort, security and personal growth... places that provide a safe haven from stressors and opportunities for emotional self-regulation."<sup>271</sup> Place, and the attachment to place, are important for human well-being, so studying how attachment occurs can yield significant insights.

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<sup>268</sup> Kathryn Colley and Tony Craig, "Natural places: Perceptions of wildness and attachment to local greenspace," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 61 (2019), 71.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

Colley and Craig's findings from their studies confirm that "perceived wildness or naturalness plays an important role in users' sense of place in relation to greenspaces and 'natural environments.'"<sup>272</sup> Colley and Craig also confirm that "Wildness and stewardship are not mutually exclusive landscape properties, and both were positively associated with place attachment, suggesting there may be value in promoting elements of both in local greenspace."<sup>273</sup> In conclusion, Colley and Craig support local greenspaces. They argue that attachment to the greenspaces requires a care for, knowledge of, and participation within the space. One cares for and belongs to what one knows.

Zening Song and Didier Soopramanien conducted a study on the impact of place attachment for citizen-driven environmentalism.<sup>274</sup> They cite a previous study, noting that "Castaneda, Martinez, Marte, and Roxas (2015) propose that if we can make people feel part of the community by raising their sense of belonging to a place, we can potentially reduce the effect of social dilemma and may achieve more pro-environment cooperation amongst residents."<sup>275</sup> Conversely, it is hardest to engage urbanites in pro-environmental activities because they perceive that they are less directly affected by such activities.<sup>276</sup>

Song and Soopramanien conclude their study by confirming that "attachment policies that focus on promoting social connections amongst urban residents to their place

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 77. While "greenspaces" is not defined within the study, it can be understood as local areas set aside or reserved for natural environment, such as city parks.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>274</sup> Zening Song and Didier Soopramanien, "Types of place attachment and pro-environmental behaviors of urban residents in Beijing," *Cities* 84 (2019), 112.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 112.

of residence will be most effective.”<sup>277</sup> The study also supports the idea that “social connection between people and place is more important for high effort pro-environmental behaviors in the urban context.”<sup>278</sup> Sense of attachment is important for environmental care. They write:

Thus, when designing public campaigns for encouraging pro-environmental behaviors, policymakers should advocate pro-environmental behaviors as part of social bonding/networking/community-life activities, especially when we consider different types of residents who have to cohabit in cities like Beijing. Furthermore, when residents feel more proactively connected (such as taking part in local activities) or socially connected to the city (with friends or other fellow residents), they are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors because they enjoy living in the city in that manner rather than just living in the city for a functional purpose (such as solely for employment).<sup>279</sup>

The findings from Song and Soopramanien encourage specific and intentional attempts to form place attachment in cities so that the environment can be cared for.<sup>280</sup>

Jan Petzold, in another study, looks at the relationship between social capital and the adaptability a community has when facing climate change. A small island in the United Kingdom is used as a case study.<sup>281</sup> Petzold argues that adaptability to climate change not only requires good structures, institutions, and plans, “but also...levels of

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Petzold, “Limitations and Opportunities of Social Capital.”

trust, cooperation, and collective action schemes.”<sup>282</sup> Petzold also finds that decision-making should be done in a manner that is inclusive.<sup>283</sup> He writes,

Civil society organisations help to bring together local and external resources and mobilise the community. Top-down institutional decision-making and administrative barriers, however, can also hinder community action. Collective action often depends on certain individuals. On the one hand, these individuals are people who are respected in the community and initiate actions.<sup>284</sup>

Community engagement in the planning and executing of crisis prevention and crisis response is vital for success.

In summary, Petzold finds that social capital is important in long-term planning and adaptation to climate change but it is less important during emergencies, especially with quick responses and distributing information.<sup>285</sup> Petzold confirms the importance of social capital for supporting communities as they adjust to the changing environment and weather. While social capital cannot solve all existing problems in a community, it can support the community in a vast variety of ways, including as it adapts and responds to the effects of climate change.

A report done by the United Church of Christ, titled “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987-2007,” offered an in depth study of the correlation between the placement of hazardous waste facilities and neighborhoods that had primarily racial minority inhabitants.<sup>286</sup> They concluded, “Race continues to be an independent predictor of where

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>286</sup> Robert D. Bullard, Paul Mohai, Robin Saha, and Beverly Wright “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1982-2007: A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries,” March

hazardous wastes are located, and it is a stronger predictor than income, education and other socioeconomic indicators.”<sup>287</sup> This study also showed that the government response to health risks due to these toxic waste facilities was significantly worse when the communities impacted were primarily made up of people of color or low-income.<sup>288</sup> This report challenges its readers to recognize the environmental inequalities people face based on these factors. At present not all places or people are valued equally. Some places--especially the inhabitants--are better treated than others. In the next chapter I will suggest that churches identify their geographical boundaries and see all those who inhabit within the bounds are part of the parish to which the congregation is called to minister to. When the boundaries are defined, both the pristine greenspaces and the toxic waste yards should be considered. All are parts of God’s creation in need of restoration. In doing so, it will likely also guarantee more diversity of inhabitants.

Northcott, an ethicist, also draws on the relationship of place and environment, especially in his book *Place, Ecology, and the Sacred*. Northcott argues that “There is a growing disconnect in contemporary life between people and the land, or what moderns call ‘nature’ or the nonhuman ‘environment.’”<sup>289</sup> He attributes this in part to the population shift towards urban and suburban locales, which decreases a population’s connection with agriculture.<sup>290</sup> Northcott believes that one solution is for local

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2007 <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/toxic-wastes-and-race-at-twenty-1987-2007.pdf> [Accessed 27 May, 2019].

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>289</sup> Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred*, 1.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

communities to once again “dwell in and care for land and ecosystems in ways that will enable a more localised, just and sustainable economy.”<sup>291</sup> Northcott argues for a more localized means of production, both food and craft, because of what he believes are the indications that the “empire will fall” and the global trade will change. He suggests that then there will be a need to be more “self-sufficient,” both as individuals and local communities.<sup>292</sup> Northcott also advocates practices that help to honor and love the broader environment. They include: being able to identify species and intentionally making identification when outside doing various activities.<sup>293</sup> Throughout the book Northcott argues that the environment does best when it is in relationship with humans, not set apart--such as national parks and preserves. Humanity is designed to be part of the ecosystem and the ecosystem to include humanity.<sup>294</sup> Marie Hoff writes:

The general environmental literature conveys a growing realization that people will care for and defend a place, that is, a local physical environment, when they know, feel, and value their own social rootedness in that unique environment. The challenge to sustainable community development groups is to find creative ways to research and to educate the general public about its local ecology and its social history.<sup>295</sup>

Northcott and Hoff both show the importance of place and how, through understanding of place and attachment to place, the local environment can receive more care and protection. Conversely, it is those who are not attached to place who often cause the

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>295</sup> Marie D. Hoff, “Conclusion,” *Sustainable Community Development: Studies in Economic, Environmental, and Cultural Revitalization* ed. Marie D. Hoff (Boca Raton: Lewis Publishers, 1998), 232.

greatest environmental degradation. Northcott uses the example of how companies, not based locally, make decisions that negatively affect the local place. This may be because of little long-term investment in the local place or because the company is unfamiliar with the particulars of the local place.

Both the Church and environmentalists have much to teach each other about the importance of place. By engaging in the local ecosystem, knowing it, and supporting its ability to flourish, Christianity can live into the true meaning of having dominion over the earth and find placedness within.

### **Other Areas of Study in Relation to Place**

The social justice community is also highly concerned with the role of place. Beatley argues, “It may be difficult to affect or influence the broader economic and social forces, but commitments to and participation at the love of place offers the possibility of real change, of making important differences in the feel and quality of one’s own life and the lives of others in the community.”<sup>296</sup> Increasing a community’s attachment to place can bring positive change to the community, including those on the margins and those with the greatest need. One example of this is increased bridging social capital.

Northcott suggests that good connection to place will encourage a style of care that is redistributive, instead of simply being a welfare state. While welfare continues to keep the power in the hands of a few, redistribution brings greater equality. He writes,

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<sup>296</sup> Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 7.

“Only the redistribution of land and titles from large landowners to small or peasant farmers, and of production and sales activities from industrial capitalists to craftsman and small shop-keepers, will suffice to turn back the centralising and servile tendencies of industrial capitalism, which of course are exactly paralleled by industrial communism.”<sup>297</sup>

Redistribution here is something that seems to echo the idea of Old Testament Jubilee. It is a practice that fights against systemic poverty.

It can be suggested that social justice requires a knowledge of the local place, to know its community, those on the margins, the struggles that exist, and the resources that are available. It requires a healthy sense of place--both communally and environmentally--for restorative changes to occur for many who are in deep need of change. The Christian community is charged to seek *shalom*, a re-making of the world into the way it is designed to be where all things work well together. *Shalom* occurs not from a distance but from when there is placedness. It requires people getting their hands dirty in the local place, sniffing the dirt to learn what will thrive and then helping to cultivate new growth.

The government also plays a significant role in how place is understood and how humanity engages with place. Putnam writes:

Voluntary groups are not a panacea for what ails our democracy. And the absence of social capital -- norms, trust, networks of associations -- does not eliminate politics. But without social capital we are more likely to have politics of a certain type. American democracy evolved historically in an environment unusually rich in social capital, and many of our institutions and practices -- such as the unusual degree of decentralization in our governmental process, compared with that of other industrialized countries -- represent adaptations to such a setting. Like a plant overtaken by climatic change, our political practices would have to change

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<sup>297</sup> Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred*, 145.

if social capital were permanently diminished. How might the American polity function in a setting of much lower social capital and civic engagement?<sup>298</sup>

While Putnam is not advocating this change, he recognizes it is a current reality. Social capital loss has affected how governing is done. Until or unless social capital again increases, how we govern will need to adapt.

Northcott supports a more localized government. He believes that people, rather than global powers, should have the right to control their own land and how it is used.<sup>299</sup> In part, this is because of the importance of local knowledge. Northcott argues that as people are moved off their land, due to urbanization, the local knowledge is lost. It is then replaced by a universal power, which puts control and power in the hands of a few and what is considered as the truth becomes narrow.<sup>300</sup> This mirrors the story of Naboth's vineyard that is addressed in the chapter on biblical precedents.

Putnam also advocates for the local. He writes, "TV-based politics is to political action as watching *ER* is to saving someone in distress. Just as one cannot restart a heart with one's remote control, one cannot jump-start republican citizenship without direct, face-to-face participation. Citizenship is not a spectator sport."<sup>301</sup> The decrease in social capital means a decrease of active political engagement. We allow those on television screens to do the analyzing, discussing, and conclusion formation. Conversely, being placed means actively engaging in politics, especially those that affect the local area.

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<sup>298</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 341.

<sup>299</sup> Northcott, *Place Ecology and the Sacred*, 131.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>301</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 341.

One change in recent decades that has led to a loss of local control is the change to how corporations are viewed. They have gone from being simply organizations to now having become “beings” that have legal rights of their own.<sup>302</sup> This is especially true for multinational organization. These multinational businesses make decisions that impact local communities. In these situations, it is often true that the local community’s needs and priorities are only minimally considered by the big businesses. The local community does not have a say in dealings even when it affects them directly.<sup>303</sup>

Beatley argues for a renewed politics of place. He writes, “The qualities and attributes of such a politics include widespread participation and inclusiveness, a rich number and variety of grassroots groups that are able, under this new political sensibility, to collaborate and come together in support of place strengthening.”<sup>304</sup> Diverse and inclusive local community organizations may be the wave of the future. An example of this is the Metro Vancouver Alliance,<sup>305</sup> an apolitical group made up of a diverse cross-section of the city. It includes, but is not limited to, representatives from faith communities, labor unions, and educational institutions. They have been meeting together for almost ten years and through community engagement, they have been able to identify the city’s greatest needs and the available resources. They work together to strategically plan for positive change and take these findings to the local government and other institutions to promote positive change for the city.

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<sup>302</sup> Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred*, 68-69.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>304</sup> Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 348-349.

<sup>305</sup> Metro Vancouver Alliance, <https://www.metvanalliance.org> (accessed Feb 22, 2019).

Northcott, who lives in rural Scotland, thus holding an outside perspective of American politics, describes George W. Bush's policies as, "'dominion' of humans over the earth, even if that dominion is closer to the domineering dominion of corporate power and the 'eminent domain' of the Nation and the State than to the kind of respectful guardianship of the earth and otherkind that ... is indicated by the use of this word in Genesis."<sup>306</sup> Government needs to regain a priority of place. Decisions made should facilitate social capital, place attachment, and an overall sense of place. When government does not take local place into consideration, it weakens local communities. Weakened communities in turn will weaken the country as a whole, for the whole is only as strong as its parts.

Just as scripture and theology advocate for a sense of place, so too do many other areas of study. By briefly looking at social sciences, environmentalism, social justice, and government, I have shown that there is much crossover between the secular world and the Church when it comes to the idea and importance of place. There are many points of commonality that may be the starting points for future conversations that can lead to a re-valuing and reclaiming of place.

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<sup>306</sup> Northcott, "Loving Scripture and Nature," 249. I offer that this has not changed with the current administration as the President continues to remove environmental protection policies and standards, and break away from international commitments that were pro-environment.

## Chapter Five

### The Placed Parish

In the previous three chapters I looked at different mandates for placedness, arguing for a renewed sense of importance for seeking place within a geographically location, its environment, and its inhabitants. I suggest that all the preceding work is important to the church in America today. For one reason, many local churches do not appear to have much of a sense of shared placedness. Many churches are “commuter” churches where people travel significant distances to worship on a Sunday morning. Living, working, studying and playing in areas other than where the church is located means that worshipping members are stretched between different locations and likely find it hard to be placed in any one of those locations. With the members stretched and spread out, it is then a great challenge to the church as a whole to be integrated into the geographic space in which it is located. The authors of *The New Parish* summarize the challenges of the commuter church by writing, “When church is reduced to a weekly worship event, divorced from the very life God intended for humans to experience, it ends up becoming a gnostic form of spirituality. Our hope is misplaced, and we tragically aim for a distorted vision of the church achievable through strategies.”<sup>307</sup>

Yet, the local church has the potential to contribute to the local community in unique ways. A study done by Valerie A. Lewis, Carol Ann MacGregor, and Robert D.

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<sup>307</sup> Sparks et al., *The New Parish*, 68-69.

Putnam looked at the relationship between religiosity and “neighborly behaviors.”<sup>308</sup>

These behaviors include some of the activities that Putnam identified in *Bowling Alone*, such as supporting charities and voting. Lewis, Macgregor, and Putnam discovered that “[n]umerous studies have examined the association between religion and civic engagement, and there is widespread agreement in the literature that religious Americans are more civically and socially engaged than their less religious peers across a range of outcomes.”<sup>309</sup> They take the research to the next level, exploring whether there is a connection between “religious social networks” and increased civic engagement. They specifically ask whether it is simply the religious individual who causes the increased engagement or whether being in relationship with other religious individuals as a unit, such as a local church, further encourages civic engagement. They conclude that “religious attendance is positively associated with volunteering, charitable giving, attending public meetings, and political engagement, as well as informal pro-social activities such as helping, giving money, and giving advice to family, friends, and neighbors.”<sup>310</sup> They write that “In fact, our results show that religious social networks have a strong impact on civic engagement outcomes, even controlling for generic sociability and social resources.”<sup>311</sup> The local church, as a unit or network, plays an important role in creating social capital. Those who are in a religious network are more

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<sup>308</sup> Valerie A. Lewis, Ann McGregor, and Robert D. Putnam, “Religion, Networks, and Neighborliness: The Impact of Religious Social Networks on Civic Engagement.” *Social Science Research* 42 no. 2 (March 2013), 331.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 341-42.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

likely to be involved in activities that create placedness than individuals who consider themselves religious but are not regular participants in a religious group. Thus it can be concluded that by being a cohesive body--the Body of Christ--the local church is able to increase the sense of placedness for a geographical area.

In this final chapter, I explore how the local church can contribute to placedness. I argue that the local church is situated within a specific community and geographical location. When the local church begins to seek placedness within the local area, it will both serve and be served. There are stances and practices that all members of a local church can make to be part of the movement towards finding placedness. I will begin with addressing a brief history of the concept of parish, then continue on with a new vision for the church today as a curator of placedness. I will conclude with looking specifically at the unique roles the baptized, the ordained deacons, and ordained priests each play in seeking placedness, not only for themselves but for the local area.<sup>312</sup>

### **History of the Parish as a Geographically Oriented Community**

The origins of the word parish comes from the Greek word *παροικεῖς* (*paroikeis*)--meaning stranger. Originally this term mainly referred to those who lived beyond the city borders. They were the outsiders. When this term began to be used to refer to the Christian community it meant that: “[t]he church was the fellowship of strangers, the community of non-belongers, who had found their place in Christ.”<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Throughout this last section, I will be looking specifically these roles within the Episcopal Church, USA. Each Christian tradition has slightly different understandings of what the roles of laity, deacons, and priests are. While much of the following chapter can be transferred to most any Christian tradition, it is helpful to remain specific within one tradition.

<sup>313</sup> Rumsey, *Parish*, 3.

The term “parish” today is often used interchangeably with “church” speaking specifically of a local church, its building and its members. Traditionally, it once spoke of a geographical space and the local church present within. In Europe, pre-Protestant Reformation, there was only one local church in any specific location and that would be the parish church for that location. Since the Reformation, with the increase of various Christian denominations, there has been an increase in multiple local churches sharing one geographical area.<sup>314</sup> The Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom still hold the geographical parish concept, to some extent, but it too has changed drastically over time.

Tracing the history of the parochial system in England presents many challenges. Rumsey writes, “the slow emergence of a parochial system from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries carried with it the same integration of sacred and secular life that defined the nation.”<sup>315</sup> He explains how the parish system in England had some oppressive characteristics: because the parishes and church buildings were built around the feudal system, the lords held power over the churches, sometimes in unjust manners.<sup>316</sup>

Positively, the parish was also the place for community. Rumsey writes, “Historically, as one case study puts it, ‘parishes have often been described as places where people recognized each other’. The Anglican parish is, then, the field of proximate

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<sup>314</sup> This was not the case for countries that had a state church. Then there was frequently still only one church in the area, the state church.

<sup>315</sup> Rumsey, *Parish*, 100.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

social relations, the ‘common ground’, in which this mutual recognition takes place; where neighbourhood is both acknowledged and practiced.”<sup>317</sup> The old parish system encourages community and identity within, thus contributed to placedness.

Over time, the parish context changed in England. As the industrial revolution created a new urbanization and people began to leave the countryside for work in the factories, some churches changed their approaches. There was a small movement by some priests to establish “slum parishes” that served the poor urban communities that were forming.<sup>318</sup> A small group of priests served these poor urban communities. Northcott mentions that most priests remained rural and had trouble adjusting to serving the new growing middle class. This became most apparent when priests were serving alongside the middle class in the First World War.<sup>319</sup> Northcott writes:

The gap between the Church and the working classes had become almost unbridgeable. The culture and lifestyle of factory-dominated working class communities came as a shock to many clergy, who were still drawn from the professional and landed classes and who, unlike Peter in relation to his old religion, were unable to critique the roots of parochial ministry and works in rural communities and to discern the wisdom of God in the city in ways which both critiqued and connected with the new life of the city.<sup>320</sup>

Northcott argues that parish ministry, especially in urban contexts, is still in need of becoming more contextualized today.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>318</sup> See Seth Koven *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>319</sup> Northcott, “Introduction” in *Theology in the City*, 3.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>321</sup> Northcott, “Introduction” in *Theology in the City*, 4.

Rumsey suggests that the current parish system in the United Kingdom needs to be re-evaluated and reimagined. He writes, “With the parish system strained to the breaking point and its relevance to society increasingly questioned, there is a pressing need to rediscover the principles that shaped it--not least because of an ever-growing political and environmental momentum to find resilient and fertile kinds of common life.”<sup>322</sup> Rumsey does not suggest that the church should do away with the parish model but that it should evolve. He argues that the parish is vital to the local community, especially because it can “uniquely [combine] religious meaning with local identity.”<sup>323</sup>

While the parish system in the USA does not share the same history as the recent UK history, it is helpful to review a brief history of how the concept of parish has developed and changed in the UK in order to form the basis for a new model of parish for the local USA church. It is good to know the history of parishes so that what is being reclaimed and what is being transformed can be justified. A fresh perspective can foster a greater sense of placedness.

### **A Vision for the Placed Parish**

The model of the geographical parish anticipates the model I will advocate in the following sections. In theory, if not at times in practice, parish was not only a church building and its members but also a defined geographical area and all that was contained therein. Moving forward, to be a local parish that truly has a sense of placedness requires

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<sup>322</sup> Rumsey, *Parish*, 4.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

an identity found in that geographical location with the environment and the people found within the location.

While any institution or organization that claims to be grassroots argues for being placed in a specific locale, the local church is different. Christ is the difference. Rumsey writes that “the Anglican parish is clearly a fundamental way of being not just place, but ‘Christ in our place’.”<sup>324</sup> While any community-based club might be able to create a sense of placedness, the parish has the a unique chance to offer a sacramental presence of Christ in place. Kenneth Leech writes, “The church is a redeemed part of the creation, not as a refuge from the unredeemed world, but rather as a foretaste of its redemption to come, when the creation itself shall be freed from decay and enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8).”<sup>325</sup> Being truly engaged in a locale--being rooted where it is geographically situated, being placed--the church allows itself to be a witness to the world of the good news of redemption. Conversely, if the church only shares the good news with those who enter the doors of the building, many will not be reached. Moving forward, when I speak of parish, I speak of a local church and their identified geographical area and the corresponding place. Not all people within the geographical boundaries will be part of the local church. Yet when the local church sees the place as part of their parish--or mission field to which they have been commissioned to serve--how they relate to the place will ideally change.

In the following section, I will look at a variety of ways that the local church can once again find placedness. I will offer a few sources of powers that bring forth

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<sup>324</sup> Rumsey *Parish*, 69.

<sup>325</sup> Leech, *True Prayer*, chapter 7, paragraph 2.

placedness and can be used by a parish. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is intended to be a start towards how a parish can seek placedness.

### *Power in Knowledge*

First, there is power in knowledge. Bouma-Prediger writes, “We care for only what we love. We love only what we know. We truly know only what we experience. If we do not know our place--know it in more than a passing, cursory way, know it intimately and personally--then we are destined to use and abuse it.”<sup>326</sup> While he is speaking specifically about creation when he writes this, the requirement of love--born of knowledge and born of experience--can be spoken of all aspects of place. Thus, there can not be a bond to a specific locale and the people and creation within, until it is truly known.

The author of *Belonging*, bell hooks, writes of returning to the rural hills of Kentucky as an adult, demonstrates the importance of knowledge of place throughout her memoir. She acknowledges throughout her book that to truly know a place means to understand both the good and bad, the broken and healed, the toxic and the life-giving. For hooks, that included racism and its effects, but also the safety in the woods, and the plentiful provisions that the land provided. As she reflected more on the life on those rural hills, she learned how the inherited fear of white people affected her youth. As a child, this fear caused her and her peers to treat the few local poor white students harshly, simply because they were white and she was taught to fear all white people. It was

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<sup>326</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 21.

through her experiences of racism, including her own behaviors, that she was able in time to examine her actions, understand the underlying motives, and begin to seek peace.<sup>327</sup>

To find placedness not only requires knowledge of the sociology of a place, but also the knowledge of the local ecosystem. Bouma-Prediger asks, “[C]ould it be that contemporary ecological degradation is a result, in part, of us not knowing our places, our own local habitats on this our home planet? All too often, I fear, we do not know our places, and such ignorance contributes to the ecological despoliation we see today.”<sup>328</sup>

Terry Tempest Williams echoes the importance of knowledge of the local environment when she writes, “...if we don’t know the names of things, if we don’t know pronghorn antelope, if we don’t know backtail jackrabbit, if we don’t know sage, pinyon, uniper, then I think we are living a life without specificity, and then our lives become abstractions. Then we enter a place of true desolation.”<sup>329</sup>

Beatley suggests that one place to start expanding the knowledge of place is through education. He suggests that curriculum should be more focused on the local place. For example, when students are taught about environmental concerns, there should be local examples of both degradation and restoration.<sup>330</sup> This can also be said for education within the parish, too. The more that teaching is based in the local, the more the congregation will see its local importance and also gain knowledge of the local. Local

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<sup>327</sup> bell hooks *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>328</sup> Bouma-Prediger “Beauty of the Earth”, 2.

<sup>329</sup> As cited by Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 11.

<sup>330</sup> Beatley, *Native to Nowhere*, 242.

knowledge can lead to further placedness. None of this is to do away with a global awareness, for that too is vital, but it is suggested that there be a balance of the two.

Knowledge comes, in part, through knowing the local history. Beatley suggests that each community has its own unique history which shapes that community in a unique way.<sup>331</sup> Sheldrake explains that it is memory that helps shape the sense of place for a community.<sup>332</sup> This suggests that it is as much the perceptions and interpretations of the historical events as it is the objective events that shape the place. To get to this shared knowledge requires relationships with others where people can develop communal memories. The power of the knowledge of the local area is an essential element in finding and developing placedness. For the local church to re-create an identity as a placed parish, increased and thorough knowledge of the local place is required.

### *Power in Relationships*

Secondly, there is power in relationships. In a largely individualistic culture, the work of relationships can increase the sense of placedness. Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh, in *Beyond Homelessness*, outline the importance of community. “And this [triune] God who is communion calls us to be in communion, that is, calls us to be a community of love. We do not sojourn solo; we do so with others who, like us, have been called to dwell in the world as homemakers.”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>332</sup> Sheldrake, “Practicing Catholic ‘Place,’” 175.

<sup>333</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 299.

Humanity is like a grove of trees in a forest. While they appear to be independent, they are actually deeply interconnected. They have the means to warn each other when danger is in the area. They support each other to grow stronger. And when they do die, they biodegrade in such away that supports new growth.<sup>334</sup> While individuals, especially in America, like to live independently, the reality is that what happens to one affects the larger community. Humanity has the capacity to hurt one another and hinder life; on the other hand, humanity also has the potential to support one another so all can grow in healthy ways.

Relationships are about more than simply knowing one another. For relationships to lead to placedness, trust and mutuality are required. Marie Hoff, in the conclusion of her evaluation of a collection of case studies that addressed good place-making, discovered that trust is vital and to form trust requires good communication and deep dialogue.<sup>335</sup> Hoff also found that mutuality was essential. There is a need for a sense that people are working *with* others instead of doing *for* others.<sup>336</sup>

The book *The New Parish* addresses the power of relationships:

When these faith communities begin connecting together, in and for their neighborhood, they learn to depend on God for strength to love, forgive and show grace like never before. We've also been inspired by the way these groups reach outward in love and care toward the neighborhood at large. The gospel becomes so much more tangible and compelling when the local church is actually a part of the community, connected to the struggles of the people and even the land itself.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How they Communicate* (Berkeley: Greystone Books, 2015).

<sup>335</sup> Hoff, "Conclusion," 236.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>337</sup> Sparks et al., *The New Parish*, 22-23.

Being in relationships positively impacts both those who are members of the local church but also all whom the local church engages--the wider parish.

Successful relationship building does not happen quickly. To be really placed within a community of others takes years. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove writes that when he was first living in a community he was frustrated with the slow progress of relationship building. A wise elder told him that if one year is invested into a community then one year's worth of relationships will be obtained; when thirty years are invested, then there will be thirty years' worth of relationships.<sup>338</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove continues to explain that community will always be a "half-born condition," a work in progress.<sup>339</sup> Relationship building takes long, hard work but the results of relationship building will help create placedness to all who share in that place.

As Putnam indicates with bridging social capital, for relationships to bring placedness, it is best if there is diversity. Seldom will one geographical location in the USA be made up of people all from the same demographic. To truly be placed is to build relationships with a diverse cross-section of the people who are part of that place. The authors of *The New Parish* call for relational work that stretches out towards those of other faith traditions and backgrounds.<sup>340</sup> They also speak of the importance of

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<sup>338</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability: Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture*, (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>339</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, *Wisdom of Stability*, 24-25.

<sup>340</sup> Sparks et al., *The New Parish*, 142.

interdenominational work, encouraging “many expressions of the church living in community together in the neighborhood.”<sup>341</sup> They write:

While diverse church expressions, gatherings and affiliations may be important, or even critical within the parish, it doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t find ways to entangle your daily life in collaboration together as the whole body of Christ in the neighborhood. Every church is more properly understood to be a part of the church in their particular neighborhood. In your unity together, so much more is possible.<sup>342</sup>

They argue that different faith practices can offer different benefits to the wider community and that they are all vital to spiritual health. It is not realistic for all of those practices to be found in one place. What they are arguing for are ways to work collaboratively together beyond those distinctive worship gatherings. One example may be joint outreach to the local community. For example, Family Promise is a nationwide organization that helps local churches work together to bring long term transformation to families who have become homeless.<sup>343</sup> One Family Promise chapter will encourage multiple churches to collaborate to provide immediate shelter and resources to equip families to secure sustainable housing. Through this work, the churches build relationships with each other and with those who are on the margins of their respective places.

The membership of local churches typically does not reflect the diversity of the local area. There have been many studies that show religious Americans show less

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>343</sup> Family Promise, <https://familypromise.org> (accessed Feb 22, 2019).

tolerance than those who do not identify as religious.<sup>344</sup> Clear connections can be drawn in America between the religious and both intolerance and racism.<sup>345</sup> Valerie Lewis, Carol MacGregor, and Robert Putnam write:

An important qualification to this literature is that there are related arenas in which religion has important negative effects and this has not been explored as extensively in the literature...Religious organizations are highly segregated along racial lines and conservative Protestantism in particular may solidify or intensify existing racial divisions.<sup>346</sup>

Because the local church has generally not been as diverse as it could be, intentional labor, creative thinking, and a willingness to make sacrifices will all be needed in order to move away from *the way it has always been* and toward a more diverse community.

When one is part of a diverse group, there is an increase in learning about place and understanding the collective memory. Hoff noticed from her series of case studies that community development was most effective when the groups that advocated for the change were demographically diverse. Hoff found that local volunteer organizations were often the way to find richer diversity in a local community.<sup>347</sup>

Part of seeking placedness through diversity requires the intentional building of relationships with those on the margins of society--the poor, the vulnerable, and the oppressed. To truly be in relationship with all who inhabit the same place will include being in relationship with those who are often on the fringes. Who is marginalized is

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<sup>344</sup> Lewis et al., "Religion, Networks, and Neighborliness," 332.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Hoff, "Conclusion," 230.

different in every place and so it takes knowledge to know the local area and the marginalized within it. The authors of *New Parish* write:

By ‘within’ we mean standing in solidarity with your neighbors who have a shared desire to see your place be a good place to live. Within is about rooting within your context. You and all your neighbors desire clean air to breathe, good schools for your children, livable vocations that serve the common good, justice for all, a voice in how things are governed, and so on. You and all your neighbors want to learn and be wise, have the opportunity to grow and be healthy: physically, emotionally, spiritually, relationally. The gospel bids us to seek the flourishing of life for all.<sup>348</sup>

While any community has diversity, communities also have commonalities. These commonalities may be the means to seek out placedness together.

As stated above, relationship building and seeking place together with those on the margins must be done together in a way that forms trust and supports mutuality. If part of being placed is being connected with others who live in the same area, then the power of relationships will help establish a stronger sense of placedness, especially when the relationships represent a true cross-section of those that are part of that place-- including those who are part of different denominations, different faith traditions, different race, different socio-economic status, and different standings within society.

### *Power in Stability*

Next, there is power in stability. Both *The New Parish* and *Wisdom in Stability* suggest that stability is key for finding placedness. Wilson-Hartgrove writes, “The practice of stability is the means by which God’s house becomes our home.”<sup>349</sup> Later in

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<sup>348</sup> Sparks et al., *The New Parish*, 47.

<sup>349</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, *Wisdom of Stability*, 17.

the book he writes, “Without the gift of God’s presence in the place where we are, stability is only an ideal for humans to aspire to--the unachievable goal of spirits whose reach must exceed their grasp.”<sup>350</sup> It is stability that helps to establish and deepen relationships and build trust. Stability allows for time to learn from the place and its history. Just as a transplanted tree takes time to put down roots and become strong enough to grow again, it takes time for humanity to put down roots and establish that sense of placedness. As noted earlier, Putnam recognized that only those who believed that they would live in one area for more than five years would actually become engaged in the area. Setting out to create stability leads to cultivating behaviors and habits that promote placedness.

Wilson-Hartgrove recognizes that staying put is not the norm for many people any longer. To help combat the tendency to be hypermobile, he writes, “To imagine stability as mission is not to assume that we will change our neighbors and the broken places where we are if only we can muster the resolve to stick it out. Rather, it is to acknowledge that there is good news in *this* place--stability that we might not have seen at first, but without which we could not even begin.”<sup>351</sup> Stability has the power to create a greater sense of place but it requires a commitment to one place for a significant period of time. At minimum, it requires investing in location as if one will be in the same place for the long haul, even if it does end up only being a few years. The parish will collectively gain a greater sense of placedness when its members are committed to the local place and seek stability as a community.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 139.

*Power of Creation*

Being aware of and connected with the local environment and ecosystem is a powerful force towards establishing placedness. Even authors who are primarily focused on human relationships for establishing place recognize the importance of also being connected to the environment.<sup>352</sup> David Barnhill explains this need for a true, strong, and healthy interdependence with the environment: “Our relationship to the earth is radical: it lies at the root of our consciousness and our culture and of any sense of a rich life and right livelihood.”<sup>353</sup>

Bouma-Prediger notes that one of the reasons that our connection with creation is important is because it has much to teach us. For instance, the study of the local ecology can teach humanity that there is a strong interconnection between all living things and the local. Ecology teaches that all that humanity does is not solitary, independent acts. Humanity’s behaviors have rippling effects on all that instantiate the notion of shared place.<sup>354</sup>

Author bell hooks identifies humanity’s connection with the environment, specifically in the African-American community. She identifies a displacement and loss of place when black families began to leave their rural homes for urban environments. She writes concerning rural black families: “[George Washington] Carver believed that black folks could gain self-determination and self-sufficiency by living in harmony with the earth even as his transcendent vision encompassed all people. To Carver, maintaining

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<sup>352</sup> Such as Sparks et al, *The New Parish*, 145.

<sup>353</sup> As cited by hooks, *Belonging*, 61.

<sup>354</sup> Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty of the Earth*, 19.

a caring relationship to the earth, to nature was a means to have union with the divine.”<sup>355</sup>

Hooks identifies, within a specific community, how the local environment contributes to one’s sense of place and overall well-being. She also shows how when that is taken away, there are grave consequences. She describes the difference: “The fearlessness and awe I experienced as a child belonging in nature imbued me with a power and confidence I soon lost in the city where I felt invisible, powerless, and lost.”<sup>356</sup> The environment is an essential component to establishing placedness, as the environment is part of place.

Without identifying the local environment, engaging it, and being in a healthy relationship with it, placedness cannot occur.

### *Power of Hope*

Lastly, there is great power in hope when establishing and maintaining placedness. Because placedness is more often sought than found, there is a need for hope that placedness can be found. Christians, by their very nature, are a hopeful community. Christians are people of the Resurrection who believe in new life, not only in the age to come but for our communities now. By sharing with the larger community the hope in placedness, Christians have the power to help establish that placedness throughout local community. Rumsey writes:

The idea of an ultimate place introduces hope and perspective into local practice. Consciously or unconsciously, we enact our understanding not only of the places we presently live in but also the places to which we aspire. It is therefore in place that we receive the call beyond our existing situation to possible future locations, meaning that hopeful action in any locale requires a degree of faithfulness to a

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<sup>355</sup> hooks, *Belonging*, 62.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

vision of how our place might one day be: such faith being the motor of all political and moral change in society, utopian or otherwise.<sup>357</sup>

Hope is the force that moves placedness from a dream into a reality.

Bouma-Prediger differentiates between hope and optimism. For Bouma-Prediger, optimism is a belief that the world is progressing towards something greater. On the other hand, hope is belief that God, the Creator of the world, is actively working with and through God's creation.<sup>358</sup> This is a recognition that God is the primary agent and we are simply participants in God's work. By being placed, we are further identifying our identity within place. We are part of something larger than ourselves. We find hope in knowing that when we are in alignment with God's work, then we will experience God and the good that God desires for all of creation. The work that we do to contribute to placedness aligns with God. God is active in our seeking for placedness, and so this work is never in vain.

### **The Placed Parish**

It is my belief that the local church is called to be an agent of placedness. It is not a call for just a few but for the entire church. Each individual has unique gifts and vocational calls. Yet there are common threads within the Body of Christ, including being called to be place-seekers. In this final section, I will look at the role of the whole Body of Christ and then also pay attention to the roles of clergy.

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<sup>357</sup> Rumsey, *Parish*, 32.

<sup>358</sup> Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty of the Earth*, 180-181.

*The Placed Baptized*

Searching the catechism in the Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer*, all members of the church have a call to placed ministry. The answer to "What does it mean to be created in the image of God?" is "It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God."<sup>359</sup> Throughout this paper, I have emphasized "living in harmony with creation and with God." As I have shown above, part of seeking placedness is being in good relationship with all of creation--which includes humanity--and with God. How do we do this as Christians? The catechism continues:

- Q.           What is the mission of the Church?  
 A.           The mission of the Church is to restore all people to  
                   unity with God and each other in Christ.<sup>360</sup>

The Church is called to seek healthy relationships that form cohesiveness among all who are part of the local place.

- Q.           Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?  
 A.           The Church carries out its mission through the ministry  
                   of all its members.<sup>361</sup>

The church is made up of many members but one body. It is the role of all members to seek placedness. It is not simply the work of a few. Seeking place will look different based on each individual's on call, gifts, and passions, but it is still one shared mission.

- Q.           What is the ministry of the laity?  
 A.           The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his  
                   Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be  
                   and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on

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<sup>359</sup> *BCP*, 845.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 855.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*

Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.<sup>362</sup>

Believers find themselves in various locations throughout their day and week, and the seeking of place can be undertaken in all these locations. Christians are to seek place in all areas of life.

The Baptismal Covenant, also found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, speaks of the ministry of all believers. Episcopalians believe that all who have been baptized have been baptized into the one Body of Christ and share in the one redemptive ministry of Christ.<sup>363</sup> We see baptism as “the fount of all ministry within it, lay and ordained.”<sup>364</sup> For this reason, the baptismal covenant can be a guide for place-seeking. If the Church sees place-seeking as one of the ministries of the Church, then baptism is the foundation for place ministry. The baptismal covenant includes:

Celebrant	Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
People	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant	Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
People	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant	Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
People	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant	Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
People	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant	Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Podmore does extensive work of discussion the history of the ministerial meaning of baptism through both the Church of England and the Episcopal Church. “Baptismal Revolution,” 14.

<sup>364</sup> Podmore, “Baptismal Revolution,” 15.

People            being?  
                       I will, with God's help.<sup>365</sup>

These words give us further instructions in how to seek placedness. Fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers can all contribute to establishing stronger relationships. These activities do not need to be limited only to interactions with other Christians or only within a church building. Breaking bread, while often referring to the Eucharist, also implies hospitality and mutuality through sharing a meal together--a way of building relationships with others. The covenant speaks of striving to serve one's neighbors. As I have indicated before, to love one's neighbor is to truly know, to be in relationship with, and to bond with others in mutual ways. Seeking placedness lives into these vows.

Graham Ward writes, "As a layperson, one is continually called upon to pray for discernment; and allow the world within which they engage to permeate those prayers, that it might be redeemed."<sup>366</sup> Yet Ward warns that often there is a tendency today to divide various roles and compartmentalize life. For example, being part of a local church and being a Christian is only one part of one's identity. In a compartmentalized life, Christian identity may not lay a foundation for who one is in all aspects of life. "I think this is one of the hardest lessons that the layperson has to learn; that he or she whether they openly declare their Christian allegiance or not, bears witness through their action and behavior to that which galvanizes them and disciplines their desires."<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> *BCP*, 304-05.

<sup>366</sup> Graham Ward, "Performing Christ: The Theological Vocation of the Lay People" *Ecclesiology* 9 (2013), 330.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

What might seeking placedness practically look like for the Body of Christ? First, there should be identification of where one is to seek placedness. If the local church, as one unit, is seeking to be placed, then it would make most sense for the geographical area surrounding the parish to be the identified geographical place. Prayer and discernment will be required to define this area and each local church will determine this differently. It may be ideal for most members of the church to live within the parish boundaries. However, this may not be realistic, at least not right away. There will be limits, though, on how much individuals can become placed if they live, work, or have their other primary activities outside of the parish. The authors of *The New Parish*, suggest that church members can be, and at times ought to be intentional about where they seek housing. They suggest that congregants should live close to the church whenever possible. They quote a pastor of a New York City church, John Tyson, saying:

What would the Church look like if we chose to buy homes in the same streets and subdivisions, the same buildings and blocks, the same suburbs and sections? What would our love look like if it showed up dozens of times a week in small but profound ways: meals cooked, prayers prayed, songs sung, Scripture studied, games played, parties thrown, tears shed, reconciliation practiced, resources given? What if we stopped attending community groups and became groups of communities? What if our homes stopped being the places we hid from the world but havens to which the world comes for healing?<sup>368</sup>

Once this area is defined, there are various ways the members can take intentional steps to become placed within the parish. Beating the bounds is one example. It is a parish tradition taken from the United Kingdom, where the congregation physically circumnavigates around the edges of the geographical parish boundaries. While traditionally it was annually done in part to make sure the markers were still in place, it

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<sup>368</sup> Sparks et al., *The New Parish*, 139.

also became a parish-wide activity for drawing the neighborhood together. Rumsey writes, “Before the advent of accurate mapping techniques, it was an equally vital means of ‘knowing your place’: the practice of beating key landscape markers with sticks...imprinting the limits of community upon each member.”<sup>369</sup> Today, similar activities can help the local church become more familiar with the area and all that lies within--people, businesses and other institutions, and the local ecosystem. There are other practices that can be done to survey the area. Making intentional steps to explore the parish may be helpful, such as through asset-based surveys. “At the heart of asset-based community development is the capacity to link your neighbors’ desires, longings and skills with one another and together discern what you can do and what you already have.”<sup>370</sup> This is all a process of “listening, discerning and acting.”<sup>371</sup> The purpose though is to gain an awareness of the local area, to begin to bond, and grow to love the parish. These types of activities lay a foundation upon which other behaviors can then be established to relate with all that is part of the area.

Establishing deeper relationships with others within the parish will require intentional means to seek out and engage others. This may be done by spending time regularly at the same local coffee shop, community center, or playground, and making intentional steps to engage others there. Additionally, it is a better practice to put away electronic devices to be available to others present in the place.

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<sup>369</sup> Rumsey, *Parish*, 121.

<sup>370</sup> Sparks et al., *New Parish*, 130. The Episcopal Health Foundation is a resource for churches wanting to do this type of local study.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*

Also, act intentionally to build relationships with those within the parish who may be on the margins. If there is a low-income school within the parish, mentoring and volunteering present opportunities for establishing relationships in place. Joining collaborative networks of organizations, such as Metro Vancouver Alliance, as mentioned above, the local place. This may be a helpful way to serve with those on the margins in ways that lead to mutual relationships.

It also takes intentionality to form stronger, healthier relationships with the parish environment. This can be done by joining a local club that either studies the local ecosystem, like a birding group, a community garden, or a park restoration program. The baptismal vow to strive for justice and peace includes environmental justice. Care for the local environment is important in and of itself, but it also brings peace and equity to the local inhabitants. As acknowledged in the previous chapter, those who are from racial and economic minorities often suffer the most from poor care for the environment. It can thus be argued that being good stewards of creation will in turn help to improve the lives of the poor and marginalized.

This is by no means an exhaustive list but simply a few examples of ways to think about how the church can intentionally seek to create a sense of placedness within the parish. Some of these things will be done by individuals, but there will also need to be some cohesiveness between these acts and the ministry of the local church for greater placedness. As the local church visions and plans for local outreach ministries, it should keep the hope of placedness at the center of the vision. It should be ministry that truly

engages the local community, doing *with* (not *for*), and bringing a greater sense of placedness for all involved in the parish.

### *The Placed Deacon*

As Podmore stresses, the ordained clergy are not to be elevated above the laity. For both ordained and lay are all baptized into one Church, one Body, and one ministry.<sup>372</sup> With that in mind, clergy do take on specific vocational calls within the larger circle of the baptized. Deacons in the Episcopal Church play a special role in seeking placedness within the parish. They are often seen as the active representatives of the Church to those they serve outside of the local church, and they remind the local church of both the joys and needs of those whom they serve. It is as if they are the threshold, bridging two parts of the parish together.

For the deacon to live into this vocational call in relationship to seeking placedness, the deacon must know those in the geographical area who are in greatest need, build relationships with them, and seek out ways to serve them, both through charity but also in ways that bring long-lasting restorative changes.

Kevin McGrane sees deacons as called to be “side-by-side” with those they serve--living and working alongside others.<sup>373</sup> This speaks of a lifestyle that allows for intimacy and true relationships. It is only when the deacon truly knows the needs of another, by being vulnerably close to them, that the deacon can help to bring Christ’s restoration to the one in need.

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<sup>372</sup> Colin Podmore, “The Baptismal Revolution in the American Episcopal Church: Baptismal Ecclesiology and the Baptismal Covenant” *Ecclesiology* 6 (2010), 15.

<sup>373</sup> Kevin McGrane, “Deacon as Wise Fool,” *Anglican Theological Review* 100 no 4 (Fall 2018): 783.

Practically, being a placed deacon can be lived out in as many ways as there are places to serve. The deacon will want to become aware of the needs of the local area and assess where those needs intersect with the deacon's own passions, gifts, and skills.

Once deacons have located their specific ministry, they are to be intentional about always growing deeper relationships and working to serve alongside to strengthen the sense of placedness for all they serve. A deacon often serves in a school, prison, or hospital. In those cases, how can a deacon create placedness? The deacon could build a community garden on the school's campus that engages earth-care for the students and also for the surrounding neighborhood. The deacon could invite the prisoners to pray for the specific needs that are in the parish surrounding the prison as a means to keep the prisoners connected with the wider place. The deacon could spend part of his or her time at a clinic serving those with limited resources to help establish better healthcare that will continue beyond their immediate needs.

Not only will the deacon serve the parish beyond those who attend the church, the deacon will hold a unique ability to help the local church find placedness. Part of the deacon's call is to teach the local church of the needs and joys of others within the parish. This is a practical way for the church to continue to grow in knowledge of their area, thus leading to deeper placedness. The deacon can share within the context of sermons, adult formation sessions, and children's Sunday School. Both instruction and prayer practices are vital to this transfer of knowledge and love of the parish from the deacon to the local church.

*The Placed Priest*

The priest in the local parish has his or her own role when seeking placedness as part of a vocational call. The priest is to pastor the people. A priest seeking placedness understands “the people” to include all who are within the parish--those who are official members of the local church and all those who live, work, or study within the parish boundaries. This view of “the people” has an impact on how the priest is pastor and administerer of the sacraments. Oden writes, “As God himself becomes personally and bodily present in the incarnation, so are we called to be personally present to those in our charge, especially those in urgent need. As God the shepherd goes out to the lost sheep and leaves the ninety and nine, so at times we must leave the secured flock and pursue the lost one who is at risk” (Matt. 18:12).”<sup>374</sup> As the placed priest explores who are the lost within the area, it may likely be people who are not attending worship services on Sunday mornings. Finding and serving those who are the lost may require an expanded search.

Oden develops the idea of priest as shepherd. He highlights how shepherding requires intimacy. “This is why shepherding cannot be done at a sterile distance, with automated telephone answering services, computerized messages, and impersonal form letters. By definition there cannot be an absentee shepherd.”<sup>375</sup> To seek placedness as a priest requires getting to know people. Oden continues to explain that Jesus’ ministry was “interpersonal” and in-personal. Jesus met on-one-one at times. It is through truly relating with those Jesus is serving, that he makes lasting changes and brings healing to people’s

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<sup>374</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1983), 171.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

lives.<sup>376</sup> Oden reminds his readers that Jesus met people where they were.<sup>377</sup> Placed priests are to seek people where they are--the workplace, the local store, the school recital, the gym. Oden writes, “When Jesus met people in their homes and work settings, he cut through to the marrow of their lives, exposed their idolatries, awakened a living sense of the presence of God, looked deeply into their souls, heard them empathetically, and called them to repentance and faith. Jesus remains the pattern for all who would converse or counsel in his name.”<sup>378</sup> The placed priest, patterning a ministry style after that of Jesus, will find that there are people everywhere in need of the love of Christ. It is the priest’s role to identify this need in the local community and help people find ways to receive it.

The priest is to be “pastor, priest, and teacher.” While it may be obvious how this is done within the church, it also has its place within the local school, coffee shop, or town festival. How it is done in each place will look different, but all will respond to the same call. The priest is the leader, showing others how to find placedness. The authors of *The New Parish* write, “The leadership task is first one of drawing people together for mutual listening, discerning and experimenting—not fixing.”<sup>379</sup> The placed priest teaches place-seeking by living into placedness.

The priest holds unique authority within the parish. “There are times when in using your authority you must, in a sense, assert yourself: avoid the false meekness of

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>379</sup> Sparks et al., *The New Parish*, 120.

timidity. But assert yourself with the authority which humbles you because it is not your own but Christ's."<sup>380</sup> This authority can be used in situations like town planning meetings where the environment and those on the margins can be advocated for through the placed priest who knows and loves the parish.

Being a placed priest will look different in every context. Again, it is first about learning to love the parish. *The New Parish* writes, "Rooting within the parish is about coming to love your neighborhood—your whole neighborhood. Dr. Cornel West often says that you can't lead the people unless you love the people."<sup>381</sup> This requires the priest to take time to be part of the community outside of the local church building and its ministries. It may mean joining local groups, like the Rotary, or more leisure pursuits like a local adult softball team. It may mean visiting church members at their workplaces in a way that serves the member but also gains introduction to the coworkers. The goal is to find ways to become more involved in the parish, building relationships with the inhabitants. It is also important that placed priests begin to learn more about the local ecosystem, taking on participation in local groups that meet this objective.

It is more than just knowing and loving the place, but also serving it in the ways that the priest has been uniquely called. Pastoral care, administration of the sacraments, and pointing towards God's redeeming love can all be done outside of a church building. For example, some Episcopal priests have been offering "Ashes to Go" for years.<sup>382</sup> This

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<sup>380</sup> Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2009), 79.

<sup>381</sup> Sparks et al., *The New Parish*, 136.

<sup>382</sup> "Ashes to Go" is a general term used for the administration of ashes on Ash Wednesday done outside of the local church and often outside the context of the larger rite as given to us in the BCP. It is normally

is an example of providing a meaningful spiritual experience for individuals outside of a church building, meeting people where they are at within the local place. I argue that there are other appropriate ways to support the spiritual needs of the place. If most young families are on a soccer field for a tournament on a Sunday morning, could an available priest offer a worship service on the field before warm up? If a large company has recently gone through significant transition and coworkers are feeling the burden, could a priest offer support through pastoral listening or the sacrament of reconciliation? When the priest is waiting in line at the local post office, and the woman ahead mentions how she has been struggling with an illness, the priest can offer to anoint her with oil and offer healing prayers right there. The Vicar Nick Buck, a Priest in the United Kingdom, is locally known as the Grocery Store priest. He spends regularly advertised time at the same local grocery store. He wanders the store in his collar, talks with the employees, and makes himself available for those who may need support.<sup>383</sup> The placed priest is aware of the spiritual needs of the place and is available to meet those needs both inside and outside of the church building.

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offered at locations, such as busy urban transit stops, for people who are unable to make it to church that day.

<sup>383</sup> “Vicar Nick Buck offering 'listening ear' in Lincoln supermarket aisles,” *BBC News* (26 Jan, 2019) [https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-46987972?utm\\_source=Daily+Media+Digest&utm\\_campaign=4b69c15268-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_01\\_08\\_04\\_54\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_296e14724b-4b69c15268-248851741](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-46987972?utm_source=Daily+Media+Digest&utm_campaign=4b69c15268-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_08_04_54_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_296e14724b-4b69c15268-248851741) (accessed Jan 27, 2019).

## Conclusion

Twenty-first-century American life is mobile. We are constantly on the move and may struggle to feel attached to any one location. We move from town to town with relative regularity. The location where we live is likely some distance from work, school, stores, and social activities. Even when we are living stationary lives, it is easy to be unaware of our neighbors and the local ecosystem. Generally speaking, we are a displaced people. The purpose of this paper is to show that there is a mandate for placedness and that the church can actively respond to this mandate.

Seeking placedness allows for community to find itself deeply rooted like a grove of trees in the forest. The winds of mobility may threaten its grounding but the tree's roots and the protection provided by the other trees will provide safety and allow for growth. When we are placed, we begin to realize that it is not just the grove of trees, which are of the same species, that help us to thrive. It is actually the complex ecosystem that helps to provide for our needs--like the beetles that aid in decomposition to return vital nutrients to the soil-- and bring us joy--like the song birds that roost in the branches. The local parish is rich in diversity. It has the potential to provide for its inhabitants' physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. By seeking placedness, we are extending our roots deep enough to tap into the potentials. In turn, we find glimpses of the joy of life that God has intended for all of creation. In turn, we grow.

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