If John Wesley quotes were compiled into a greatest hits list, “The world is my parish” would have to be in the top 3.

It’s the kind of pithy quip that we religious folks just love. It fits on a T-shirt and it can be used as a defense for almost any activity that catches our fancy.

“Why are you going to Nicaragua?”

“Because, ‘the world is my parish!’”

“We missed you in worship this Sunday.”

“Hey, ‘the world is my parish!’”

“What church are you a part of?”

“Look, ‘the world is my parish!’”

There’s so much room in this quote (the whole world, actually) that it can be used as a means of dislocating ourselves. Claiming the whole world broadly can become a convenient way of neglecting the specificities of our actual locale. Saying that we love generally is no substitute for the work of loving the particularity of where we are.

Perhaps it would be helpful to remember the rest of Wesley’s quote.

He writes, “I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.”

Wesley was not making a global claim as a means of neglecting the particularities of place and peoples. That’s the work of the colonizer. Wesley is a pastor.

What he is saying is that wherever he finds himself, he treats that place and the people therein as a particular expression of holiness and seeks to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

In this edition of the NRS newsletter, you will hear some stories about Wesleyan leaders among us today, and the ways in which they are declaring the glad tidings of salvation in their neighborhoods.

We call that, “holistic mission.” “Holistic” because it takes into account the whole of a place, and a people. “Mission” because it seeks to be aligned with the work of Jesus Christ in every place and every people.

These stories are bearing witness to the good news that in the person of Jesus, God is still taking on flesh and “moving into the neighborhood.”

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John 1:14, The Message Bible
SHARE THE GOOD NEWS
by Rev. Wes Neal, I Am Project@Asbury UMC

At the end of the opening session of the Evangelism class I taught at Daukilevu Theological College in Fiji, I would always issue a simple challenge. “Before we meet again, share the good news with someone who needs to hear it.” The stories the students told the following week were a handful of seeds scattered on the ground. All through the next term I would watch as some of those seeds grew into changed lives and hope in unexpected places.

Little did I know then that this simple challenge was to become a part of my rule of life. Since beginning to work with New Faith Communities in a congregational re-start in Durham, sharing good news with people who need to hear it has become central to my daily work. Whether I am speaking the challenge to my congregation, or hearing the Spirit’s challenge in my own heart, I trust that every faithful response is a handful of seed scattered on the ground.

How have the neighborhoods of Southeast Raleigh influenced your church?

Many of Southeast Raleigh’s neighborhoods, bordered by two HBCUs (St. Augustine’s and Shaw) have long held a rich and complex history for Raleigh’s black population. It is quite common for unsettling reports to highlight the challenges of growth for these areas. Out of a growing concern for the future of Southeast Raleigh, we’ve seen organizations like Southeast Raleigh Promise and the AJ Fletcher Foundation start to re-shape the narrative towards a flourishing Southeast Raleigh.

See Indy Week 2011 article on Southeast Raleigh advocacy.

Southeast Raleigh Table (SERT) is the 3rd worshipping community of Edenton St. UMC born out of a desire to intentionally connect with the traditionally black neighborhoods in Southeast Raleigh. SERT moved towards a missional framework, hoping to connect with neighbors in downtown Raleigh that were unrepresented in their worship services at Edenton St. Today, many in our congregation take this commitment seriously by also living near or in Southeast Raleigh. One of our centering scripture passages is John 1:14 MSG, which our pastor, Rev. Lisa Yebuah, often quotes: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”

Whether we are navigating conversations of racial equity, connecting with students on campus, or providing backpacks and supplies to local elementary schools - we show up in this community. We value its rich history continue to value collaboration from diverse set of voices. We often encourage our worshipping community to connect with organizations just like Southeast Raleigh Promise (SERPromise.org) who are trailblazing the way in providing equitable resources in areas of wellness, education, healthcare, and housing. It’s exciting to see what could be next! We live and work here and want to see Southeast Raleigh not only for the privilege few - but for all.

We do this by showing up, leading compelling and full lives transformed by the power of Christ, and doing every day life right here in Southeast Raleigh.

A table blessing IN TIME FOR THANKSGIVING

Bless, O Lord, this food to the nourishment of our bodies, and our bodies to your service, and keep us ever mindful of the needs of others.