

BLOOM WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED

Folks who know me well know that I rant and rave about religious clichés – things like, “Oh, don’t worry; God’s in control.” Or, “God will never put more on you than you can handle.” (This one is particularly annoying because it’s actually not in the Bible and also gives us a picture of God, arbitrarily handing out hard times in order to test our strength, as if he might not know how strong we are otherwise.) And how about, “Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Just learn the lesson you need to learn and all of this will go away and never come back.”

Of course, the trouble with religious clichés is that there’s just enough truth in them to make them dangerous. What they do to people, in my experience, is make them feel guilty for even having a problem. Surely, if their faith was just stronger, or their trust in God was greater, they wouldn’t be suffering like this, right? And for me, that’s just kicking folks when they’re already down.

So what do you do with a passage like Jeremiah 29:4-7? The Israelites are in exile in Babylon, and false prophets are telling them they won’t be there long; why, don’t even unpack your suitcase. But Jeremiah tells them that what God is really saying is, “Build houses, get married, get your children married. While you are in exile, do not decrease, but increase. And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, because in its welfare, you will find your own welfare.”

Which surely is another way of saying, “Don’t listen to those false prophets. In fact: Bloom where you’re planted.” And that, unfortunately, is a religious cliché if I ever heard one.

But there it is, and it’s true. Sometimes we find ourselves in a place we desperately wish we weren’t. What we want is for God to get us out; what God tells us is that we’re going to have to be there for a while, so we need to go ahead and bloom, just where we’ve been planted.

In fact, wherever we are, we’re instructed to pray in and for that place and its people. Are we in a job we hate? Pray. Pray for our boss, our co-workers, and ourselves in the midst of it all. Are we in the middle of an illness that seems to drag on and on and just won’t go away? Pray. Pray for doctors and all medical personnel, for whoever God puts in our paths. Have we hit a rough patch in our marriage? Don’t just up and leave. Pray. Pray for our spouse, our home, and for ourselves.

We may not want to be where God has planted us for the time being, but sometimes “acceptance” is the word of the day. And that means we must draw closer to God than ever, pray, talk to him, share our hearts honestly with him, and realize something amazing: In the welfare of those around us, we can find goodness for ourselves, as well.

As Joshua says, and Jeremiah says as well in a different way, “Be strong and courageous, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Sometimes the best thing we can do is just bloom where we’re planted.