

A Pilgrim Goes Shopping

Written by Vivian Bikulege

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I am on a kind of pilgrim's journey these days. It started in mid-April, just after Easter, about one month into these weeks of quarantine. The constraints of contagion are loosening, but my retreat into learning more about who I am will last through the rest of the year. When the formal study ends, I wonder what will carry through the remainder of my life.

Today, I am thinking about a metaphoric shopping list of my desires and wants. They have changed in the course of six decades. In my past, I wanted success in my career. I wanted to acquire some level of comfort and status in my home and surroundings. I wanted a strong, toned body, satisfying relationships, and a good income. Now, I am retired. I downsized when I moved to Beaufort out of necessity, not choice. For the most part, I am healthy, but I am witnessing the losses age imparts on everyone. I've lost people I still love, and financial security seems to be the ability to stay belted in my seat on the economy's roller coaster.

What would you put on your life's shopping list if you were heading to the supermarket of your destiny wearing a face mask? Mine will differ from yours because of our individual circumstances but maybe we share some commonalities. In no particular order, here's mine.

Good health. Over two weeks ago, I hurt the arch of my right foot by pounding on a shovel's step digging holes to transplant azaleas. Limping around slowed me down. A swollen foot caused me to consider the real warriors facing terminal illness, disability, and dementia. We are gifted with one body, one machine, one expiration date. I was grateful I could walk. Please toss a healthy body into my shopping cart.

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Loving relationships. Love feeds our physical and spiritual well-being. I had a doozy of a fight with my husband about two weeks ago, right around the same time I was wrestling with dirt. Conflict and disagreement damage the heart and mind. A lack of love creates a vacuum that sucks joy from our sails. Loneliness is a plague that surpasses the devastation of Covid-19. Love takes circuitous routes around our lives. I want to give the same love I want to receive. A two-for-one sale on this item is a good deal, but I'll pay the extra money for a premium brand.

Enough. My shopping list should represent the things I need, not everything I want. Over the course of this pandemic, stores were depleted or in short supply of toilet paper, eggs, hand sanitizer, bread, bleach, and meat. For a while, some stores were out of potatoes and onions. The compulsion to overbuy, to hoard — our survival mechanism — is an instinct that defeats any virtue of sharing with others over, and over, and over again. I have mine, you get yours. The clutter in my home is a tell-tale sign that I have more than I need. I doubt I know what “enough” looks like, but I'll put it on my list. I'll try to stay in the 10 items or less line at checkout.

Faith. This product comes in a multitude of sizes. There's the travel size, enough to get us through security checkpoints. Acquiring faith in volume — small, medium, large or bulk — depends on what we've saved up in our piggy banks. Regular deposits of prayer, acceptance, and time in nature make it possible to stock up and pull from our pantries during the lean times. Faith gives us the opportunity to be creative with random ingredients and leftovers. Faith is usually stocked on the same shelf with other spices like hope, courage, and wisdom.

Ice Cream. Gotta have it. Putting ice cream on my shopping list of wants and desires is the same thing as making sure I have fun, adventure, laughter, silliness, smiles, sunshine, and song in my buggy. This is when you choose the shopping cart that is actually a giant plastic car, load it with your kids, and head straight to the cereal aisle for Fruit Loops and Cocoa Krispies. Something sweet to take home. Cut flowers. Juicy strawberries. A donut smothered in sugary glaze and rainbow sprinkles. Gotta have glee. Gotta have delight.

I am nothing more than a pilgrim in flip-flops and a tee-shirt making her way down a grocery store aisle, probably going in the wrong direction, believing that the person stocking shelves can direct me toward the coffee so I can wake up tomorrow alert and refreshed. We've all learned that grocery stores provide essential services. Maybe stock clerks are guardian angels in disguise. The next time you are making a list to go to the store, think about angels. They're all around us. All we need to do is ask for help.