

Tribune Article
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February 23, 2018

A Lenten "Bucket List"

It's my birthday this week! Two years ago I was fulfilling a life-long dream of visiting Easter Island as I celebrated turning 50. This summer, I'm crossing off another "bucket list" item with a visit to Pompeii as a delayed birthday present to myself. At this rate, I may actually visit every place I've hoped to experience by the end of my life.

With a late February birthday, it's often important to consider where it falls in the liturgical calendar. I've had people turn down birthday cake because they have given up sweets for Lent. And it can be hard to find room for a fairly selfish celebration if the overarching mood of the season is one of contemplation and repentance. Lent can affect the nature of my celebrations.

And that's the thing about "bucket lists" – those lists we make of things we want to do before we "kick the bucket" – they are pretty much like birthdays. They are about the things WE want to do to satisfy our wishes and hopes. And there's nothing wrong with having personal goals. Without a plan for our lives we might just wander from thing to thing aimlessly.

But when the shadow of Lent falls on my "bucket list," as with my birthday, I see it in a different light. Yes there are places I want to go, and things I want to do, and adventures I'd like to take. But as I walk toward Easter in these 40 days of self-reflection, I begin to realize I have another sort of "wish list" as well.

In the light of Lent, I realize that in addition to looking up at the Eifel Tower, I would really like to become more like my grandmother, whose kind words make our family look up to her for encouragement. Standing in just the right position on the steps of the Parthenon in Athens will make an amazing selfie for my photo album someday, but becoming a person who really listens to those around me puts me in just the right position to impact in the lives of others. Yodeling from the Alps may send shivers down my spine, but speaking up for those who have no voice will help warm and comfort the oppressed.

Perhaps this Lenten season many of you are already making headway in spiritual disciplines. Maybe you have not only given something up, have taken something on – a deeper practice of prayer, regular acts of service, a fasting from informational overload and/or a deeper communion with Nature. And if you haven't, let's join them. Let's develop and work toward "bucket lists" that make us better people; doing God's work; being God's hands and feet and voice in a world that can use a lot of kindness and care and advocacy.

And even though becoming more kind, or an advocate, or more in touch with God's Spirit isn't something that allows us to hold up a copy of the Tribune and snap a photo, they are indeed the best kind of journeys. And we'll be all the better for making the trip.