

You're in the queue, outside the supermarket. Everyone's standing two metres apart, waiting patiently. You're exhausted. Physically and emotionally. Suddenly a sports car screams by and stops abruptly in the disabled bay by the front door. A young man, in impossibly tight-fitting jeans, jumps out, clutching his smartphone. Flicking his mop of hair, he half-runs up to the door, where the security guard waves him through with a laugh. Around you, people start to grumble. You've never seen him before. 'Oh, he's a big deal on social media—one of those influencers,' mutters someone behind you. 'Well, he can influence the security guard, that's for sure!'

A week later, you're back in the queue. Same thing happens. Same sports car, same smartphone, same tight jeans, same flick of the hair. But this time when the young man bounds up to the door, something's changed. There's a new security guard. You've seen him somewhere before—where was it? You try to remember but a voice interrupts, 'Listen, mate. I don't care if you're live streaming in half-an-hour. Get to the back of the line and queue like everybody else.'

That's when the guard looks in your direction. 'Dr? ... Dr Mary? Is that you?' You smile awkwardly. Must have seen him in the hospital then. So many patients. Too many names. You nod.

'Well, what you are doing standing there for, love?' The security guard is walking towards you now and he's talking to the people in the queue. 'This is Dr Mary, everybody. Saved my missus, she did, years ago. Come on, Dr Mary. You should've worn your lanyard, you daft thing. No need for you to queue.' 'Oh, you know', you mumble, 'we've all got busy lives.. didn't want to make a ...' But now you don't know what to say because some of the people in the queue have started to clap as the security guard walks you towards the doors. 'In you go!', he says with a big smile. As you thank him, you look over your shoulder. The young man is now at the back of the queue, on his phone, scrolling furiously.

[Slight pause.]

Jesus tells us, 'For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.' But look around. Nearly everything in our society is normally geared towards the opposite. Self-promotion's the name of the game. You're a brand. You've got to sell yourself.

I say normally but these last few months have been anything but normal. And for some, it's been an opportunity to reflect on what really matters and what should be given priority.

But will any of it stick? We've already grown weary of applauding the key workers. Will we be like the young man, hiding behind his phone at the back of the queue—just like the humiliated guest at the wedding banquet who's been told to take the lowest place? Or instead will we be like Dr Mary? Standing humbly in line, not even using her lanyard to get preferential treatment?

It all depends on what we believe reality truly to be. Is it dog-eat-dog where you have to fight your way to get to the top, a constant game of self-advancement (be it in business, the arts, sport, or even, yes, even the church)?

Or is it instead that the way down is actually the way up?

As the church, we hold that it is. That the way down *is* the way up. Not just because of what our Lord Jesus taught. But because he's lived it—his life has this down and up shape. First he came down from heaven, descending to the depths of death on the cross for us in all its humiliation and shame. Then he rose to new life, ascending to God's right hand where he now sits enthroned, in judgement.

There's a new guard on the door. There's a new host at the wedding. One that knows us all. And his kingdom is in our midst. The topsy-turvy kingdom, where down is up and up is down. 'Friend, move up higher.' 'Dr Mary, in you come—no need for you to queue.'

'For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

Amen.