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THE HERO SERVANT

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I couldn't believe my eyes. We were standing on the observation deck of the Sky Tower in Auckland, New Zealand, enjoying the spectacular view of the city. Suddenly a man appeared in front of us - on the other side of the glass, suspended in mid-air by a harness from a small crane. There he hovered, looking absolutely terrified. I can still see his face!

He gave a nervous wave, and then disappeared, being lowered rapidly to the ground 200 metres below, before safely landing on his feet. Who in their right mind would choose to do that!? I wondered...and pay over \$200 for the privilege - I later discovered! Another part of me secretly admired the man for having the courage to do it, and I asked myself if I would ever be brave, or stupid enough, to try it.

That kind of behaviour seems common in New Zealand – the home of bungee jumping. I wondered about this strange nation of people who loved to jump from great heights and lower themselves from almost anything. As I reflected on that day, it got me thinking about my Christian faith and life. The Christian faith says that Jesus Christ came down to earth from heaven at Christmas. The Son of God didn't stay in the comfort and glory of heaven or hold on to what was rightly his as God, but joined us here on earth. And then, as a human being, he lowered himself even further....

The Bible says:

“Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8 - NLT)

Jesus could have been anyone – a king, a movie star, a gladiator or superhero, but he chose to be – a servant. And not even a servant for a king, but the servant of everyone. He lived life on earth serving people with friendship, healing, and forgiveness. Occasionally he did use his power as God - but never to serve himself, only others with needs. Mostly he laid his power aside altogether, especially when he gave up his life to forgive the world on Good Friday.

On Palm Sunday Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem. The crowd that lined the streets that day thought his entry into Jerusalem was an upward move, that he would be their king, get rid of the government and make life easy for them. No wonder they cried out to him “Hosanna” - “save us!” and “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” But Jesus rode into town on a donkey - an animal used for carrying people's burdens, not on a horse with chariot or with an army. He knew his move into Jerusalem would lead to his death on a cross by the end of the week. The same crowds that called on him to save them would be calling for him to be crucified. He knew it would go that way but made the conscious choice - to lower himself.

That day at the Sky Jump in Auckland I couldn't work out why anyone would put their life on the line by climbing out on a ledge and allowing themselves to be lowered hundreds of metres like that

so rapidly. I sometimes wonder why on earth Jesus, who is God, would allow himself to be lowered by becoming a servant to the point of death. What possessed him? The answer is love - love for you and for me and for every last one of us is what possessed Jesus to lower himself like that. Jesus looked beyond the pain ahead of him and beyond the fickleness of human beings to what we really needed from him, and he was willing to come and empty himself and give himself to us. That's the direction he chose to go on Palm Sunday.

The direction most of us want to go in life is up – up the social scale, up an income level, and to come out ahead in our dealings with other people. We imagine the view from the top of the pile is better than where we are now. Jesus chose another way, and he shows another way to live. As those whom Jesus has come down to serve, God calls us to have his attitude.

St Paul wrote: “Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” Philippians 2:3-5

Being willing to lower ourselves in loving service of others, emptying ourselves rather than being full of ourselves - goes against the grain. We seem wired to think of ourselves most of the time, to be self-conscious rather than conscious of the needs and feelings of people around us.

Standing on the edge of Sky Jump your mind would be your biggest obstacle. The same is true of humbling ourselves and serving others. Our mind is our biggest problem. We need Jesus Christ's own mind to take over ours. That's why we need to spend time with him every day and to reflect on his word and in prayer so that his thoughts, his mind become ours. His mind will show in us when we forgive each other rather than trying to get even or on top of people, and when we build others up rather than pull them down to make ourselves feel better. We don't have to, because we know we are loved and secure in Jesus.

The man who allowed himself to be lowered from the sky tower in Auckland needed to be absolutely sure he was securely held before he was willing to be lowered to the ground. The more we learn about Jesus the more we discover how securely held we are, how safe we are with God. Forgiven, given eternal life, and assured of his ongoing presence, Jesus is our anchor point, our place of certainty and security about life and death, the future and God. Being attached to him frees us to take risks and to serve people, to put others first, and to undertake menial, unthanked task without worrying about ourselves.

The crowd that cheered Jesus on Palm Sunday walked away by the end of the week because he was not the kind of king they had hoped for. But billions have followed him and found him to be just what the crowd was crying out for that day – someone to save them, in the deepest sense of that word. Safe with God, they have also heard his call to follow him in a very different direction in life, daring to believe it is the best way to go.

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