

James Moore, a wonderful preacher, tells the story of Charles, who was a fighter pilot during the Vietnam War.

He flew 75 successful missions, but on the 76<sup>th</sup> – his plane was hit and he had to eject and parachute to safety.

He was captured, spent several years as a prisoner of war. He survived and went around the country as an inspirational speaker.

One day, Charles and his wife were in a restaurant and a man came across the room to him, “Hey, I remember you! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kittyhawk. You were shot down.”

“Yes, have we met before?” Charles asked, thinking it might be someone who had heard him speak.

The man said, “I’m the guy who packed your parachute!” And with a big smile on his face, “I guess it worked!”

Charles gasped in surprise and gratitude, “It sure did. If that parachute you packed hadn’t worked, I wouldn’t be here today!”

That night, though, Charles couldn’t sleep.

He kept thinking about that man – wondering how many times he might have seen him on the ship or walked past him as just another sailor standing at attention – because Charles was an officer, and this guy had been just a sailor.

Charles thought of the many hours this sailor had stood at a long table on the aircraft carrier, carefully weaving the strands and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands somebody else’s life.

It’s a good story James Moore tells, and the question explodes out of the telling: Who packs your parachute?

Who’s packing your parachute?

Who’s getting you ready for the critical moments in your life? Those decisive moments when your life is on the line?

Who’s packing your parachute? Who is working now so that when a crisis comes in your life, you are prepared, ready to meet the challenge?

Who packs your parachute?

This is one of the most critical questions for you to answer – at any age or stage of life - young people, parents, families, older adults, students, singles, married – in whom or what do you put your trust?

Everywhere you go – you can’t avoid it – the cry and clamor for our trust is all around us...

Money talks that way, the military does, gangs and cliques, alcohol and drugs say it. Material possessions, politicians and government, pleasure and work...

Trust me, give me your loyalty, commit to me!

Let me pack your parachute!

We’re all too aware and maybe even victims of the unbelievable agony because people put their trust in the wrong things – their wealth, their anger, their fear, emotional reasons, brainless reasons – people choose to trust the wrong things.

This is precisely what the scripture lesson in Isaiah is all about.

Look again at verse 2 in Isaiah 55, and I like the way Eugene Peterson translates in *The Message*, easy to understand: *Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?*

Why do we put our trust in those things that don't satisfy, that have as much substance as spun sugar?

Our scripture readings this morning from Peter and Isaiah ask us to consider just where we place our trust.

It's about choosing the packer of your parachute.

I want to say three things about that – first of all, we should be able to trust our family.

I say this, and I'm very aware, some families are not trustworthy – children today are being left to raise themselves – maybe in a big house, but it's not a home – it's full of stuff to keep them happy, but no parents to give them love.

Indeed, some husbands and wives are finding, no, missing the same things in their house.

The substantive, fundamental, crucial, basic, essential, critical, vital, indispensable, necessary – I don't know how many other ways to say it – the good things for life should be packed by the family.

I was at a presbytery conference a couple of years ago and heard a preacher say that he was grateful for his parents because as he grew up, they gave him three things he needed so much: love, discipline, and supervision.

He knew his parents loved him. He knew the rules. He knew they were aware of what he was doing.

That's what all children need, isn't it? Love, discipline, and supervision. Children need to know that when the world treats them rough, and it will, at home with family they are loved and respected and cherished.

We need to trust our home, and our families need to be trustworthy.

How many times have we seen and heard this week when people have lost everything in the floods of Harvey, the reporter ends the story and says, "They'll be staying with family."

The parachute for tough times needs to be packed at home.

Second, we should be able to put our trust in the church.

As Rabbi Harold Kushner points out, "(The community of faith) offers... a refuge, an island of caring in the midst of a hostile, competitive world."

Or let's say, the church 'should' offer. Again, I'm very aware the church has not always been that place of love and growth and acceptance.

Ken Medema, pianist/singer, expresses the need of so many lost and hurting people in his song, "If This Is Not a Place."

He asks for a place, referring to the church, where you can go when you've got questions and need answers, when you're down and you need some help – to be accepted, a place of friendship, as he sings, *If this is not a place where tears are understood, where can I go to cry? If this is not a place where my spirit takes wing, where can I go to fly?*

The best picture I have right now is what I call the church of Mattress Mack. Maybe you saw the story of the furniture store owner who opened up his stores to what he calls "my people" for a place to sleep, to rest, to regroup, to be safe, to cry.

The church needs to be our family of faith.

"Who's packing our parachute?" Put your trust in your family and your church.

Finally, put your trust in God.

Or really, not finally, but underneath it all, choose to put your trust in God.

I hear you, though, *“All these pictures of family and church in the storm, but how can we trust God when people suffer and die in unbelievable catastrophes in our world like this storm named Harvey?”*

Or Hurricane Katrina? You know the statistics there – about 1,300 people dead, another 4,200 people missing, almost 300,000 people lost their homes.

What about the earthquakes a few years ago in Pakistan or Haiti? Thousands died, millions homeless.

Or it’s fading rapidly into the past now, isn’t it, but what, two hundred thousand deaths or more from the tsunami in southeast Asia back in 2004?

How can we trust God in face of all of these tragedies, and what about those storms that don’t make the evening news, but people live with them day after day?

We know people who are facing the approaching terror of illness and disease...whose marriages are failing...who haven’t spoken to loved ones in years.

There are those who have a mountain of debt and no chance of paying it off...people who are facing addictions, depression, and anxiety.

We have people who are alone. We have people facing all kinds of storms.

But that’s the context of God’s invitation in Isaiah that come at the very end of the long storm of the Israelite exile in Babylon.

COME – Is there anyone thirsty, come and drink; or as Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.”

We will face situations in our life when we will not know what to do, overwhelmed by the stormy circumstances out of our control.

LISTEN – Listen, listen well so that you may live, says Isaiah; or as God spoke on the Mount of Transfiguration, “This is my Son, the beloved, “Listen to him.”

We all will read about and hear about events in the world around us and we will not know what to think, whom can we trust for the truth?

SEEK – Seek the Lord while you can find him, call upon him now while he is near, or as Paul wrote, “If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above...”

As I read Scripture, it seems to me that it’s in the storm that we can truly experience God’s presence...like at this table when Jesus met with his disciples in the midst of the storm on the night of his betrayal and in the darkness that surrounded him on the cross as he trusted God saying, “Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Come, Listen, Seek – not forced, not out of fear, but through faith, for faith – to accept the parachute God packs for you and me as we come to those unknown challenges and opportunities before us.

When my father was dying of cancer, because I was afraid, I asked him, “Dad, are you afraid?”

And he answered, ‘If my faith is no good now, what good is it?’

Now is the time to consider the choice about your life: to ask for God’s strength and place our world, our nation, our church, our family, and ourselves in God’s hands, through Jesus Christ to come to trust in God.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.