

Packing Up
Texts: Hebrews 13:1-3, 5-8, Luke 5:17-26
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – July 4, 2021
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Charles Plumb was a US Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent 6 years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on lessons learned from that experience!

One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down!" "How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb. "I packed your parachute," the man replied. Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man pumped his hand and said, "I guess it worked !" Plumb assured him, "It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today."

Plumb couldn't sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, "I kept wondering what he had looked like in a Navy uniform: a white hat; a bib in the back; and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said 'Good morning, how are you?' or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor." Plumb thought of the many hours the sailor had spent at a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't know.

Now, Plumb asks his audience, "Who's packing your parachute?" Everyone has someone who provides what they need to make it through the day. He also points out that he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy territory - he needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute. He

called on all these supports before reaching safety. Sometimes in the daily challenges that life gives us, we miss what is really important.

We may fail to say hello; or please; or thank you; congratulate someone on something wonderful that has happened to them; give a compliment; or just do something nice for no reason at all. As you go through this week, this month, this year, recognize people who pack your parachutes (Source unknown. From Email 08/04/03).

In our text for this morning from the Gospel of Luke, we have this wonderful story of a group of men who would risk everything in order to get their friend into Jesus' direct presence. "Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus." Jesus is impressed with their faith and commitment – so much so that He not only forgives the sins of this paralyzed man, but also commands him to stand up and walk. And he does!

It would be easy to get caught up in some of the details of this wonderful story from the Gospels. What did the owner of the house think when these men cut a hole in his roof in order to lower down the paralyzed man? Was he angry? Did the friends of the paralyzed man pay him to fix the roof? Or wonder at the observations and responses of the Pharisees who just tried to trap Jesus in what they considered blasphemous.

Instead, this morning, I want us to focus on the dedication and commitment of these friends. They knew their friend needed help. They knew that he could benefit from being in Jesus' presence. Were they expecting Jesus would heal him? We do not know, but their actions

point to the strength of their community. They would do all of this so that their friend might have a chance at new life.

Who in your life packs up your parachute? Who is your “go to” when things go south or when you have a need? Who are your mat carriers – those people who are there at just the right time and are willing to risk for the good of all? This is what community – Christian community – is all about. That we look out for one another in these ways. That we are there for each other in the best and worst of times. That we can have such deep connections with another brother or sister in Christ that we would go to these heights for them.

Thanks be to God, but I believe that we have that. I have seen – over and over again – over these last 8 years that I have been your pastor how you have cared for one another. How you have been there for one another. The behind the scenes ways that you love with the love of Christ – dropping off meals, sending cards and notes, giving rides to appointments, praying for and with one another. And not just within our church family, but with those whom we do not even know. How we care for others in our ministries of compassion. We have entertained angels without even knowing it – of this I am confident. With so much division and side taking in our world today, it would be easy to abandon being in this kind of relationship with one another. There may be things that we disagree on – and some of those issues may invoke a great deal of passion inside each one of us. I know there is disagreement with the pandemic and how the church is responding to it. We cannot let this divide us. We cannot let this drive a wedge in the fellowship that we share together. We can still be a church family – the kind of family that lifts one another up – even to the rooftops – in order to assist others in seeing Jesus.

Let us continue to be that kind of community – that would carry one another’s mats, that would care so much in the name of Jesus. For the example that is set by doing so impacts our

world – it transforms all of the dark places. Our communities need this kind of care – our world needs this kind of care. Let us continue packing up one another's parachutes. Let us be the light of Christ in this way. Let us pray...

Holy and Eternal God, we give You thanks for this wonderful story about friendship and commitment to others. Lord, You alone know how difficult these times are – and how we need one another now more than ever. Help us, we pray, to look out for one another – to continue to pack one another's chutes so that we might grow together in our love for You. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.