

Eulogy at a Memorial Service for Former President Jimmy Carter

January 9, 2025

Leaders of the clergy; distinguished guests; most importantly, the Carter family:

In April 2021, Jill and I visited Jimmy and Rosalynn on a warm spring day down in Plains, Georgia. We wanted to see them.

Rosalynn met us at the front door with her signature smile. Together, we entered a home that they had shared for almost 77 years of marriage, an unassuming red-brick ranch home that reflects their modesty more than any trappings of power.

We walked in the living room, where Jimmy greeted us like family. That day, just the four of us sat in the living room and shared memories that spanned almost six decades. A deep friendship that started in 1974.

I was a 31-year-old Senator, and I was the first Senator outside of Georgia—I—maybe the first Senator—to endorse his candidacy for President. It was an endorsement based on what I believe is Jimmy Carter's enduring attribute: character. Character. Character.

Because of that—character, I believe, is destiny—destiny in our lives and, quite frankly, destiny in the life of the Nation. It's an accumulation of a million things built on character that leads to a good life and a decent country: a life of purpose, a life of meaning.

Now, how do we find that good life? What does it look like? What does it take to build character? Do the ends justify the means?

Jimmy Carter's friendship taught me—and, through his life, taught me that strength of character is more than title or the power we hold. It's the strength to understand that everyone should be treated with dignity, respect; that everyone—and I mean everyone—deserves an even shot, not a guarantee, but just a shot.

You know, we have an obligation to give hate no safe harbor and to stand up to what my dad used to say is the greatest sin of all: the abuse of power.

And that's not about being perfect because none of us are perfect. We're all fallible. But it's about asking ourselves: Are we striving to do things—the right things? What values—what are the values that animate our spirit? Do we operate from fear or hope, ego or generosity? Do we show grace? Do we keep the faith when it's most tested?

For keeping the faith with the best of humankind and the best of America is a story, in my view, from my perspective, of Jimmy Carter's life. A story of a man—to state the obvious, you've heard today some great, great eulogies—who came from a house without running water or electricity and rose to the pinnacle of power. A story of a man who was at once driven and devoted to making real the words of his Savior and the ideals of this Nation. A story of a man who never let the tides of politics divert him from his mission to serve and shape the world.

The man had character. Jimmy held a deep Christian faith in God and that his candidacy spoke and wrote about. Faith as a substance of things hoped for and evidence of the things not seen. Faith founded on commandments of Scripture: Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy soul and love thy neighbor as thyself. Easy to say, but very, very difficult to do.

In his life—in this life, any walk of faith can be difficult. It can be lonely. But it requires action to be the doers of the world.

But in that commandment lies the essence, in my view, found in the Gospel, found in many faith traditions, and found in the very idea of America. Because the very journey of our Nation is a walk of sheer faith to do the work, to be the country we say we are, to be the country we say we want to be. A nation where all are created equal in the image of God and deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives.

We've never fully lived up to that idea of America. But we've never walked away from it either, because of patriots like Jimmy Carter.

Throughout his life, he showed us what it means to be a practitioner of good works and a good and faithful servant of God and of the people.

And today, many think he was from a bygone era. But, in reality, he saw well into the future. A White Southern Baptist who led on civil rights. A decorated Navy veteran who brokered peace. A brilliant nuclear engineer who led on nuclear nonproliferation. A hard-working farmer who championed conservation and clean energy. And a President who redefined the relationship with the Vice President.

Jimmy and I often talked about our dear friend Walter Mondale, whom we all miss very much. Together, they formed a model partnership of collaboration and trust, as both were men of character.

And as we all know, Jimmy Carter also established a model post-Presidency by making a powerful difference as a private citizen in America and, I might add, as you all know, around the world.

Through it all, he showed us how character and faith start with ourselves and then flows to others. At our best, we share the better parts of ourselves: joy, solidarity, love, commitment—not for reward, but in reverence for the incredible gift of life we've all been granted.

To make every minute of our time here on Earth count, that's the definition of a good life, a life Jimmy Carter lived during his 100 years. To young people, to anyone in search of meaning and purpose, study the power of Jimmy Carter's example.

I miss him, but I take solace in knowing that he and his beloved Rosalynn are reunited again.

And to the entire Carter family, thank you—and I mean this sincerely—for sharing them both with America and the world. We love you all.

Jill and I will cherish our visits with them, including that last one in their home. We saw Jimmy as he always was: at peace, with a life fully lived. A good life of purpose and meaning, of character, driven by destiny and filled with the power of faith, hope, and love. I'll say it again: faith, hope and love.

As he returned to Plains, Georgia, for his final resting place, we can say goodbye. In the words of the prophet Micah, who Jimmy so admired until his final breath, Jimmy Carter did justly, loved mercy, walked humbly.

May God bless a great American and a dear friend and a good man. May he rise up—be raised up on eagle's wings and bear you on the breath of dawn and make you to shine like the Sun and hold you in the palm of His hand.

God bless you, Jimmy Carter.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:31 a.m. at the Washington National Cathedral. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 10.

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