

This week I don't know how many of you watched President Carter's funeral service. It was really different than what I had expected. He chose to have a State funeral, which is different than a regular memorial service. It is a special honor for certain people. And they elected to have it for him. And I say that it's interesting, and I was surprised by it because it was a funeral. The purpose of the funeral is to remind us of the void that the person is going to leave in our lives. It's to remind us that we're going to be missing that person. It's to remind us to grieve and be mournful and sorrowful in that service.

And when I think about Jimmy Carter, I don't think that he was that way. That he would want us to remember and be sad that he was gone. He would want us to remember who he was and the great things that he did. And to be joyful in everything that had happened. So it surprised me. It especially surprised me because he always considered himself a born-again Christian. And God and Jesus were very important in his life and what he did whether he was Governor, Senator, President, or anything afterwards. God was the center of everything that he did. Jesus was his vocal. And it was really overlooked in that service. I mean it wasn't, it was obvious that it was a beautiful service and everyone spoke very highly of him and everything. But the idea that Jesus was that middle ground, that Jesus was everything that he lived for, he aspired to be, was greatly overlooked. And that really surprised me.

Up here we don't talk about being born again Christians nearly as much as they do in the South. You know, in our faith, we don't really get born again, We don't do things like that. At least not in our side of it. And a lot of them don't up here. Being born again is a point more of the Baptist and Evangelicals. They resubmerge themselves to get baptized over and over, kind of like what they were talking about in John's reading today or Luke's reading to John I should say.

John was going around and he was telling everybody that they needed to repent for what they were doing. And in the Jewish faith at that time, people would go and they would just get baptized. They would feel that they had changed. They would feel that they had erred. They had sinned against God. And by going and getting baptised, it would clean them up. Kind of like the Catholics version of, I got confirmation stuck in my head. It's not confirmation but when they go and ask forgiveness, Yes, it's that kind of thing. So it wasn't that big of a deal and John tried to make the point that it's a huge deal. But it's a big deal to give yourself to God. You submit yourself to everything, Not just today.

When I was living in Arkansas, we had what we call Sunday Baptists. It was a very big part of being down there. People would identify themselves as Baptist they would be like well are you a Baptist? Are you a southern Baptist? Are you a born-again Baptist? Are you a Sunday Baptist? Because it's all different down there. It's all different. And all these different groups and the Sunday Baptists are Baptist to go to church on Sunday, and then sin all week and go back to church on Sunday and it's all good. And John would not like that. You know, the faith is specifically named for him. It's specifically named for his teaching. So, what Jesus did, so by just giving up on Sunday, or I should say, giving back on Sunday was huge no, no. You can't just go throughout the week and do whatever you want. And then on Sunday come to church and be like, well it's okay. I'm at church. I can do these things again the rest of the week. That's what he's saying. We shouldn't live that way. To the tax collector, you don't just go during the week and you don't have enough money so you take it from somebody else. You claim a new tax, you

claim a new penalty. So you get more money in your pocket, so you get more money you can give back to Caesar. Don't do things like that. You got two coats. You see somebody freezing in the winter? You don't keep both of them. You give the other one back to them. You live a righteous lifestyle, every day, all day. That's the commitment that we're supposed to be making. That's the commitment that we're supposed to have.

Jesus doesn't just look at us one day a week. He doesn't look and see who's in church on Sunday? He doesn't look to see who's giving money to this charity, who's doing this at the school who's doing this. He doesn't care about that. It doesn't matter each day if he sees you doing it once. What he wants is for us to live a life where we try every day. We don't succeed. Nobody succeeds being righteous every day. If they do, they're lying to you because it just can't happen.

Jimmy Carter was a born again Christian, because he lost his faith in the church. He didn't lose his faith in Jesus. He lost his faith in the church. His dad was a pastor. And in the 60s, he started to recognize the fact that the Southern Baptist convention wasn't following what he felt was right. And he lost his faith. I'm sure a number have lost their faith at some point or another. Not necessarily that we've lost it in Jesus, but that we've lost it in the big church in the big ideas.

You know, every week I am fighting with somebody at the national level, I'm fighting with them because I don't agree with the majority of what the national level does. But I agree with what we do here. That's the greatness of being a congregational church. We decide for ourselves. We hold ourselves accountable. We don't have somebody at the national setting come down and tell us we have to do things today because they said so. We get to decide that for ourselves. So National setting doesn't really like me. They don't like that I vocalize that I don't agree with a lot of what they do..

If you remember, the UCC is made up of two different groups. By the time we finally formed it was a congregational Christian Church like we are, like we were, and the Evangelical Reformed Church. The Evangelical Reform Church recognizes today as remember your baptism Sunday. So they still do born agains. Today is a day that they do it collectively. They all come together. Evangelical Churches, the Baptist churches, the UCC Evangelical churches come together, and today they get re-baptized. They reaffirm their faith in God and Jesus. They go back through and remember what it's like to make that choice. Remember they make their choices later in life. We baptize as infants. We baptize whenever, for different reasons, for different points. They baptize when they're young adults. They make the choice to go and follow Jesus, to follow God and how they can and to live that lifestyle. So it's easy for them to remember.

I was baptized at three months old. I don't remember anything from when I was three months old. But I do remember every day the commitment that we make, that I make, that we make here as a church to follow Jesus's life, to follow that baptism. Each morning I wake up new and refreshed and revitalized thinking about what we're going to do next. What we can do to share God's love ,to share Jesus's words and wisdom. That's what Evangelical means. It means to share the good news. It doesn't matter what faith you are. It doesn't matter what your denomination is, it doesn't matter any of that. You're sharing the good news, what it means to be a Christian. What it means to do these things. We don't need to be reminded one Sunday out of the month. We do this all the time when we're volunteering, when we're filling bags, when we're

helping somebody across the street, we do things on a daily basis that show the world that we don't need to be reminded one day out of the week of God's love. We don't have to worry, but what do we do when like they did in the reading, we know, because we follow that, because we believe in it, because we love everything that Jesus does for us, did for us. We continue to share that growth every single day. Let us pray.