

Jimmy Carter: When the waters rise, so do our better angels

By Jimmy Carter – Saturday, September 2, 2017

Jimmy Carter was the 39th President of the United States. He is founder of the not-for-profit [Carter Center](#), which works to advance peace and health worldwide. He and his wife, Rosalynn, have been volunteers with [Habitat for Humanity](#) for 30 years. The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.

(CNN)When a disaster like Harvey strikes, I often see glimpses of the world I first knew.

One of the things I remember most clearly about my childhood in rural Georgia was the notion that neighbors were more than just the folks who lived next door or down the road. Neighbors were people you could count on -- and people who could count on you -- whenever a need arose.



Jimmy Carter (center, in dark jacket) during a Habitat for Humanity project in July.

And it's not just disasters. Rosalynn and I have seen this impulse in our work around the globe. Anytime people come together in common purpose, miracles happen. We've seen elections proceed fairly, houses go up, diseases nearly disappear. But only because people of goodwill make it so.

Unfortunately, we all know that's not the world we live in every day. Instead, we seem trapped in a never-ending storm of rancor, divisiveness and distraction. How much could we accomplish together, though, if we were able to see the world every day the way we see the world after a disaster? Neighbors in need. People with resources. All of us in this together.

This is what the people of Texas and Louisiana deserve from us as they begin the long road of recovery. They deserve our best selves, the ones who see suffering and move to address it, the ones who understand their responsibility to help the most vulnerable among us, to help their neighbors. These disasters don't disappear when the flood waters recede -- and neither should our better angels.

The good that comes from those times of action creates a healing halo -- for those who are suffering and for those who are able to help. In our work with The Carter Center and Habitat for Humanity, Rosalynn and I always get back so much more than we give. The joy of helping others is truly a privilege that we cherish, and we know just how much you, how much all of us, can benefit from that same feeling.

Habitat has always been the most effective way for Rosalynn and I to live out our faith. The response to Harvey is a perfect opportunity for you to join us. When you help Habitat help families struggling in the wake of this storm, you change the world.

Get busy helping someone else and see -- over time -- the things you might have in common, instead of only the things that might divide you. Remember what can happen when we love our neighbors as ourselves. There are storms that bring us together and storms that divide us. We have a chance now to choose. Harvey already has reminded us what we're capable of, when we come together.

The recovery ahead will be long. Our neighbors need to know they can count on us. The families affected will need our help and our attention as the work of rebuilding unfolds. If we hold our focus on the important matters at hand, we can use the power of the people to create that world we all know exists -- if we will simply give it life.