

“Andrew Gold’s Timeless Anthem”

2 KINGS 2:1-12

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Andrew Maurice Gold was an American singer born in 1951. His works include the Top 10 single "Lonely Boy" (1977), and "Never Let Her Slip Away" (1978). The thing that Andrew Maurice Gold is best known for, at least to the layman, is that in 1978 he wrote, played, and sang the song: "Thank You for Being a Friend." There are 361 words to the lyrics of this anthem to friendship. The phrase "thank you" occurs 32 times. "I want to thank you, thank you, thank you for being a friend."

What kind of friendship did Elisha and Elijah have? When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; I've got to go to Bethel. It's a long trip. You'll get tired." But Elisha said not only that he was coming, he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So Elijah went down to Bethel; and Elisha tagged along.

Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here. Now I've got to go to Jericho. It's a long trip. You'll get tired." You can guess how Elisha took it: "No, I'm going along with you. You're old. You may come into robbers. You could sprain an ankle. *As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.*"

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." What did Elisha say? "You will not travel alone. *As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.*"

I wonder if Elijah said "thank you" to Elisha. Thank you for being a friend. Thank you for standing with me. Thank you for walking with me. *Thank you, thank you, thank you* for being a friend.

I wonder if Naomi said that to Ruth. Ruth was the daughter-in-law who would not let Naomi travel alone across that dangerous wilderness. I'm going with you, Ruth said. I'll be your companion. Ruth said:

"Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!"

Was Naomi grateful? Did Naomi say thanks? *Thank you, thank you, thank you* for being a friend.

I wonder if Paul thanked Timothy, or Titus, or Priscilla, or Aquilla.

I wonder if King David ever said thank you to his dearest friend Jonathan. *Thank you, thank you, thank you* for being a friend.

Did James thank John? Did Mary thank Martha? Did Lazarus say it to Jesus? Remember how they loved each other? Lazarus had died when Jesus had been out of town. Jesus came home, and upon hearing the news, was shocked; the shortest verse of the Bible says it all: Jesus wept. Was it too late to say it? *Thank you, thank you, thank you* for being a friend.

Remember the story of the ten lepers that Jesus healed? It's found in Luke 17. Ten lepers approach Jesus and ask to be healed. Jesus does, and they leave rejoicing. But one—he is a Samaritan, a foreigner—turns back, returns to Jesus, kneels, and thanks Jesus. Jesus asked, "Only one returned to give thanks? Were there not nine others? Where are they? And this one—this foreigner—is the only one to say thanks?"

The words "thank you" are foreign words to some of us. But gratitude is essential for friendships.

This is what Anne LaMotte says everyday to God. In the morning her prayer is, "Help me, help me, help me." At night she says, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

If you haven't thanked Charlotte Bash recently for being a friend, it's too late. Her memorial service was yesterday.

The Chicago Bears running backs Gayle Sayers, a black man, and Brian Piccolo, a white man, were kept apart because of the color barrier. When Piccolo was dying at age 26, Gayle Sayers was losing his best friend. Yudisley and Aaron showed us what friendship looks like at last week's International Taste of First Pres.

Who do we need to thank? Who do we need to appreciate? *Thank you, thank you, thank you* for being a friend.

I think Elisha's faithfulness to Elijah is meant to remind us of how God is faithful to us. God won't let us walk alone. God will be present, even though others will get tired, or busy, or interested in other things. God is faithful to us, even when we aren't faithful to God. God is patient when we are distracted. God is steady when we are indecisive. God is light when we are dark. God is hope when we are despair. God is whole when we are broken. God is good. (All the time.) God is faithful.

And I think Elisha's faithfulness to Elijah, also reminds us to be faithful to each other, to walk with each other even if the road takes a turn we don't like. Following Elijah and Elisha's lead, let's walk together. And if one of us insists on going it alone, maybe the words of Elisha might be appropriate: *As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.*"

*And when we both get older
With walking canes and hair of gray
Have no fear, even though it's hard to hear
I will stand real close and say,
Thank you for being a friend . . .*

To God be the glory.

AMEN.

Old Testament 2 KINGS 2:1-12

¹Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

⁴Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

⁶Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." ¹⁰He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." ¹¹As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹²Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.