

With Thanksgiving for the Life
of Andrew John Remington
November 23, 1936 + August 3, 2019



The first time I ever met Andy became I think the longest hospital visit I've ever done.

I generally figure hospital visits should be and are brief. A sick person trying to find energy for healing and rest doesn't really need a clergyperson loitering about trying to make small talk, especially when that clergyperson is a stranger. So I figured I'd pop in, and if Andy was in the room and awake I'd introduce myself and hear a bit of what why he was there and say a quick prayer about it then be on my way home to supper.

Well, something over an hour later it had gotten dark outside and not only was it maybe my longest pastoral care visit, but also the one with the deepest theological conversation as Andy shared his view on things and invited my thoughts and feelings.

He took this stuff seriously. In the language of our Bible reading, he wouldn't probably claim quite the extent of "understanding all mysteries and all knowledge," but he was seeking to understand. In the millennium-old definition of

theology, he had "faith seeking understanding." But it wasn't just to engage his brain or to try for a deep conversation. His faith was truer than that.

The reading also talks about having "faith to move mountains." And again though it's not the limit of this for Andy, certainly another of the characteristics of Andy's faith was his conviction for miracles. Most of my visits with him insisted on trusting in miracles, that there would be enormous surprises from God. I value how he didn't expect those only to be in an instant flash of light, but included that God's goodness would find us in more ways than we had reason personally to expect. That outlook was even embodied in his refrain that he never achieved all he was capable of, but still he did more than he thought he could, better than he imagined.

He very much counted his relationship with you, Helen, as a prime example of such miracles, and also then the extension to the amazing family he gained and to be able to be called grandpa. For a man who saw miracles, that was probably the biggest. And I'd say there's been something miraculous about it for you, too, Helen, including as people around Advent have been remembering much in these days those terribly hard times at the sudden death of your first husband. Andy came in with more goodness than you'd expect and got to enjoy and be secure in for so long.

Those initial connections make me also think of early days through Al-Anon and how Helen has told me that Andy was so committed in leading the 12-step program that he said there was no other way, that you had to follow it. Some of that sounds like Corinthians' refusal to rejoice in wrongdoing, and those very difficult efforts to set life right or at least better as bearing all things and enduring all things and hoping all things. It takes that kind of commitment to make it through sometimes, to pursue truth.

For comparisons, he also for some reason wanted it said at this service that he liked learning about time-outs as a wise discipline method for children. Maybe we'd pair that with the reading talking about putting an end to childish ways and reasoning.

But again, his faith wasn't just that. It wasn't understanding theology. It wasn't solely expecting miracles. It wasn't only about trying to do right.

Of course, what I'm dancing around here is what you probably know deeply about Andy through and through: that for him, the core was love. He'd say that some guys were bashful about love and wouldn't want to say "I love you," but he'd say it straight out and deeply mean it. I'd give Helen a hug with my goodbyes, and he'd insist that he wanted one too and didn't feel bad about it.

Another of those particularly Andy surprises that he wanted stated at this service was that he discovered after a few years of marriage that it wasn't only about the sex. (There you go, Andy. It's not the sort of thing I'd say in a church service, but you get your request.) And it's maybe a funny and silly line, but we also trust it as truly Andy, that he most definitely lived more fully in love.

Love was with Helen.

Love was with family.

Love was with friends, including the words from the GEMS we're hearing.

Love was with Al-Anon.

Love was with the briefer connections, like with staff at Sienna Crest or nurses in the hospital, where he'd joke and poke a little fun with his sly smirking smile as a way to change their work day and, indeed, know they were loved.

Andy was great at love.

I've been pondering since I got the news of his death on Saturday morning about the last line of the Corinthians passage, that faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love. Why love?

I probably have times of wanting faith to be biggest, trusting in God or in Jesus. I want to get my theology right and to know and to understand. But it says that's not biggest.

I often want hope to be biggest, to be confident it will all work out, that there's something amazing around the corner and more to come. That's not the greatest.

Well, I already said Andy didn't have all the answers, so it wasn't ultimately faith for him. And in spite of his thought of miracles, he had some very hard moments of doubt and worry when the cancer diagnosis came in and as he anticipated death. He had peace, too, but I won't say it's only that. So he wasn't suspecting or hoping everything would be okay or that the cancer would just go away.

And he certainly continued to persist in love, in his concern for Helen and very precious close times and conversations together, and for the rest of us. Still, the readings says, "love never ends, but now we're without his love. There are no more hugs, no more deep-voiced gravelly assurances of "I love you."

But for what I don't have figured out, and what Andy may not always have had either, for the sake of pondering today about this passage, I'm grateful that Helen insisted on our other Bible passage. "For God so loved the world that God have the only begotten Son, so that we might have eternal life."

What abides, the greatest of these, isn't our faith. It's not the power of what we hope. It's not even that we love. It's that God loves without end. We can say we knew a reflection of that love in Andy, the unstoppable unfathomable complete love of God in Jesus. God loves you. Even now and forever, God loves Andy. That remains eternally, and that's the greatest.

God of all goodness. We praise you and offer thanks for the gift of life. For farming and fishing. For family and friendships, for marriage. For all that delights us, and those delights and surprises we shared as a gift from and with Andy. God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Redeeming God, we give thanks for your miracles and gifts of healing that restore our relationships and bring new

beginnings throughout our lives, even as we move past sad endings. God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

And when it seems like health has lost, that the ending is final, we ask you to persist and abide in love for us, hold us in your embrace, and make us confident in the promise that your love will bring us to eternal life. God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for all who mourn, that eyes filled with tears may find joy in seeing you face-to-face. God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Grant to us who are still in our pilgrimage, and who walk as yet by faith, that, where this world groans in grief and pain, your Holy Spirit may lead us to bear witness to your light and life. God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Help us in the midst of things we cannot understand to believe and trust in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to everlasting life. God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of all grace, we give you thanks because by his death our Savior Jesus Christ destroyed the power of death and by his resurrection he opened the kingdom of heaven to all. Make us certain that because he lives we shall live also, and that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

GEMS reflections:

(OPENING) I am glad he was willing to sit for a portrait sketch in early summer. We give thanks for the gift that he was to all. John

What a straight up guy. I enjoyed our talks. We'll miss him as will all of us. Al W

(AMAZING GRACE) I learned more that was important per minute from Andy than I had any right to expect -- and I told him so. Amidst the sadness I now remind myself to remember his love for everyone--no exceptions, his encouragement to all and his positive sense of humor with never a caustic, sharp edge. My job, moving forward, is to put those lessons into action even more consistently.

Andy, in many different ways, in us you to live on. Goodbye for now good brother.

don

(BEFORE COR) Andy had a special combination of knowledge and human wisdom: what people are, what they need, how they provide it for each other. Brad

(BEFORE JOHN / became flesh) Andy was a loving and down to earth guy and easy to love and easy to know "where he was coming from". Wayne

(PEACE) Andy's gruff, rough, practical, bear-like humanity brought a good degree of appropriate paternal integration to a population in sore need of that integration, and interest. Rest in peace, our world will miss you. Bob Shearer

(COMMENDATION) Andy was special and I will certainly miss him. His spirit was remarkable and an inspiration for all of us. Rest in peace Andy. I love you! Roger

(BLESSING) He was a blessing to many and to the rest of us GEMs. Marc