

Epiphany 2 1/17/16
Isaiah 62:1-5 C

YOU SHALL NO MORE BE TERMED FORSAKEN, AND YOUR LAND SHALL NO MORE BE TERMED DESOLATE, BUT YOU SHALL BE CALLED MY DELIGHT IS IN HER, AND YOUR LAND MARRIED; FOR THE LORD DELIGHTS IN YOU, AND YOUR LAND SHALL BE MARRIED.

If you do a Google search for the world's greatest love story, -- and I know this because I did it -- you will receive answers like Paris & Helen, Antony & Cleopatra, Lancelot & Guinevere, Romeo & Juliet, and even {I'm not making this up!} -- Bonnie and Clyde. You know what you won't find on a list of the world's greatest love story? The story of Azubah and Immanuel. What? You've never heard of the story of Azubah and Immanuel, so let me tell you all about it.

Azubah was one of those girls, well, the kind of girl you don't take home to mother. It had nothing to do with her cooking, cleaning, knitting, or laundry skills, oh no. Azubah was not a Christian; she didn't believe one word of the Bible. There were only curses of God on her lips. In fact, she willing and loudly worshipped other gods. She was a boozier, an adulterer, a whiner, a complainer, a gossip, a cheat, a thief, a coveter. Not the kind of girl you'd take home to mother. And yet, that's the kind of girl that makes for the greatest love story ever.

You've heard of Azubah; sure you have. Azubah is just another name for ... Israel. You remember that story from your Sunday School days, right? God chose Abraham to be the Father of a great nation and promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand upon the shores. When those descendants were enslaved in the land of death, they cried out to God to deliver them and He did. When they crossed over to dry ground, Moses told them to be careful

to do all that God commanded them to do and all the people cried out with one voice, "We will do what God tells us to do," but they didn't. So, God sentenced them to wander 40 years in the wilderness. God opened His hand to feed them with manna, but they grumbled and complained. God led them into the land flowing with milk and honey, and He told them to kill all the pagan inhabitants of the land, lest these idolaters lead Israel to fear, love, and trust in false gods. But, Israel didn't. Even when God made them the richest, more powerful nation on earth, they wanted to be just like their pagan neighbors. Their hearts turned from God to worship the gods of their own bellies, and Isaiah foretells them of the time to come when Babylon would take them into captivity because of their unbelief and impenitence.

We love a good love story, whether is a Shakespeare play or a romantic movie. And I think there's a reason for that. Here's the reason why: you can see yourself in the story. You can imagine and dream that you are in that kind of love and romance, and you don't have to think about dirty dishes and wet towels on the bathroom floor.

In Azubah, in Israel, you see yourself, don't you? You see how you have not kept the Commandments of God in your thoughts, words, and deeds. You have not loved the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind and you have not loved your neighbor as yourself. You have feared, loved, and trusted in the gods of your own design. When you look at yourself in the mirror of the law, you see your sins, your failures, your shortcomings. That is why you confess, "We confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean." You look at Azubah, and you see yourself -- Forsaken, Desolate, yep, that's me. That's who I am.

This love story isn't just about Azubah. There's that other party -- Immanuel. And in Immanuel, there is nothing but love.

Immanuel is not exactly a Sir Lancelot or Romeo. Oh yes, He is true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, but yet His mom is a young peasant girl, and her husband is a carpenter. He's not from some swanky, cultural center like Paris, or New York, New York; He's from the little town of Nazareth, the kind of place that causes people to ask, "Can anything good come from there?" When it comes to physical handsomeness, Isaiah tells it like it is:

He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom no men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed Him not (Is 53:2b-3).

No Romeo there, all right.

And yet, no one has ever loved as Immanuel loved Azubah. No one has ever loved anyone the way Immanuel has loved you. The way He loves is not with poetry, or candy, or flowers, the way Immanuel loves is like this:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Is 53:4-6).

That is the way Immanuel loves His Azubah; the way He loves you.

He loves you so much so that He takes from you all your sins, all your iniquities, your failures, your shortcomings, your sorrows, your griefs and He carried them all the way to Calvary's cross. And there He gave His life

for you, His beloved. He gave His life-blood to cover up your failures, your shortcomings, your sorrows, your griefs. He does it all for you, so that He might sanctify you and cleanse you by the washing of water with the Word. He does it so He can present you to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing so that you may be holy and without blemish.

And you can be certain of it because your Immanuel rose from the dead the 3rd day to bring you the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, by means of that washing of water with the Word, by means of His written, spoken, and preached Word, by means of His Supper, where He feeds you His life-giving body and blood. He gives it all to you in these means of grace.

He rose the 3rd day to make you His holy bride. And as it goes with all brides, so you goes with you, O Azubah. “Azubah” is the Hebrew word for “Forsaken.” Isaiah tells us the Good News of the Gospel, “You shall no more be termed forsaken,” because your bridegroom Immanuel changes your name, “You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married {literally, Beulah, for Beulah means “Married,”}; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married” (Is 62:4).

So, you can understand why it is so shocking, annoying, even infuriating, that Immanuel and Azubah are left off the list of the greatest love story ever. It's the greatest love story ever, of all time, of all peoples, of all places. It's the story of Immanuel, God with us, who loves us so much that He took away all your failures, your shortcomings, your sorrows, your griefs.

It's the story of how He gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation. It's the story of how He changed your name from Forsaken, Desolate, to My Delight Is in Her and BEULAH.