

## Nothing and Something/Just Bathe, You Idiot

2 Kings 5:1-14; Galatians 6:1-10; Luke 10:1-11

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Some years ago, I confessed to a shameful little secret.

That, at times, and in phases, I am... a pro-wrestling fan.

It tastes dirty even saying it.

Well, it is what it is. And I'm sure all of you have your own little secrets that you'd be embarrassed to admit to. And that's okay. If you ever need someone to confess to, especially if it's something as ridiculous as say, enjoying a fake sport, I'm here for you.

Anyway, before he became one of the most prolific box-office draws in cinema, Dwayne Johnson was known as the most electrifying man in sports entertainment; and he went by the wrestling moniker, "The Rock." Saving you from a pointless venture into outright drivel, I'll synthesize his in-ring career by highlighting some of the catchphrases that he got over huge with the fans. For starters, he incepted into their public consciousness a strange enjoyment for calling someone worthy of derision a "jabroni." He then trademarked a facial expression of ironic disbelief "The People's Eyebrow." And ultimately he would ask "if you could smell what he was cooking," if you agreed with all of his points. You can rest assured, I won't be asking if you can smell what I'm cooking by the end of this sermon. But chief amongst his jabs was the notion to "know your role and shut your mouth," and, that (in comparison to him), "it doesn't matter who you are, or what you think." This last line, he would he yell into the microphone, interrupting whoever had appeared, or who was talking, putting them in their place much to the delight of the audience at hand.

And so... if The Rock was a Biblical character, walking around in the times of Kings, I could so see him grabbing a ram's horn, interrupting Naaman's little tantrum, asking: *Hey, Naaman, who wrote that letter for you?* and right as Naaman began to formulate a response... "It doesn't matter who wrote that letter for you!"

Recalling our first text from this morning, Naaman was said to be a great man, a commander of an army, a mighty warrior, armed with chariots, horses, pounds of gold and silver and garments, and also, an esteemed letter of reference from none other than a king – the king of Aram. One look at this guy and his entourage, and you would think man, this guy must really be something!

Unfortunately, this guy also was infirmed and was in desperate want of a cure. He hears from a slave girl that there's a prophet in the adversarial region of Samaria (Aram being in Syria, Samaria being in Israel) who might be able to do something for him, and so he sets off on course, flanked by all of his power and incredible wealth. But when he arrives at the very footstep of that remedy, and hears of the simple solution to his problems -- to simply bathe in the river Jordan -- instead of just being like "oh, awesome, that's easy!" he dives into an insufferable meltdown. *How dare the king of Israel not meet with me! How dare he instead send this prophet, Elisha, who doesn't even have the decency to leave his house and heal me on the spot! And not only that, but this guy then has the audacity to send his lowly messenger to tell me!? No, I won't have it.* And so off in a rage he shuffles away like a toddler, with his sickness still in tow.

Just go in and bathe, his friends urge him. You came all this way in search of a fix, to make yourself great again, and here it is... Come on, Naaman, you're acting like a jabroni.

The lengths we go, man. The lengths we go not to go. The lengths we don't go so we can stay in the same place. All the excuses we contrive to block our way forward. All the things we sell ourselves to keep us blind to the solution right there before us.

Have you ever been to a party, or a celebration, perhaps on a holiday, where there's this guy who's just drunk on himself, droning on and on without even a flea's-breath of self-awareness? Who is quick to celebrate all of his fortune, and equally quick to complain about his most minor of inconveniences? If only he could shut up for a

second, you think, and just listen to what he was actually saying, how he might be able to hear how ridiculous he sounds and see how easy his path actually is. (“How strong our desires, how weak our knowledge of ourselves” we’ll sing in the hymn). Just stop, Naa-man. Just breathe, and bathe, you idiot.

But instead of seeing his leprosy as a sign that perhaps he is not so mighty after all, and that maybe he should not act so favored, Naaman behaves like an entitled brat, demanding that his perceived lessors appeal to his desires. Overcompensating for his vulnerability, Naaman inflates his sense of self-worth into something that by the end is nothing short of laughable. Like some of us parading around today, who know our wounds and shortcomings, our sins and skeletons, instead of owning up to them, and being humbled by them, we instead become a walking parody of ourselves and our title. Grandiose illusions of authority. And so, equally devoid of having of any shred of self-awareness, we don’t stop our sick thoughts from reaching our lips, but make it our daily meditation to prop ourselves up by tearing others down. Dehumanizing others to deify ourselves.

Just like Naaman, we so often expect everyone else to adapt to our presence. To marvel at our wealth. To congratulate our accomplishments. To covet our references. But just like Naaman, we will one day be faced with the simple truth. That none of that ever really mattered. For in the end, those things will be like nothing, for in the grand scheme of life, we are just a blip. Dust. Just another homosapien, amidst a multitude of species, breathed into the same creation, by the same Authority, who equalizes all of us as rightful children of God.

Fittingly, Elisha never says a word to Naaman in our text. He never addresses him directly. He never meets him at all. And so when Naaman appears at Elisha’s door, with all of his pomp and pageantry, I like to imagine Elisha looking out of his window, shaking the dust off his sandals, so to speak, thinking: *this guy... man, know your role and shut your mouth. It doesn't matter who you are or what you think. For you are just like everyone else here, Naaman. Nothing more, nothing less. And no, don't get angry at that revelation. Don't get mad and tweet and stomp your feet. Just join in and go down to the water. For like everyone else in this community of life, you must carry the load you've been elected to carry, so as to not burden the rest of us.*

Now mercifully, at the end of our story, Naaman finally comes around. He listens to the reasoning of his peers. He follows the steps given to him by Elisha’s messenger. And he humbles himself in the presence of the Samaritans (who no doubt he had just harbored an extreme prejudice against), and he bathes seven times in their river. And amongst them, tethered to the source of their life, he is cured.

Timeless and appropriate, I’d say.

My friends, it doesn’t matter who you are...the color of your skin, the flag that you raise, the XX or the XY or, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter how much money you have, what college you went to, or how many friends you’ve got by your side. We are equalized by our common mortality. Our common infirmity. Earthquakes and hurricanes, fires and storms, injuries and sadness, regrets and grief. It gets us all. We are all nomads on God’s Earth, in God’s nation, seeking asylum from pain and a better chance at life. We are all equalized in our common humanity.

By God, and the wisdom of Divine impartiality, we have all been made to come as we are, whoever we are, and dine together, as one, at this table. You at your core are fundamentally no different than the family behind the wall, the prophet in the castle, the child in the camp, we are all children of the same God who made us equitably in that One Holy Image.

So just, be humble. Come in peace. Remembering that “You reap what you sow. So, let us not grow weary in doing what is right; so that whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all (Galatians 6:8-10).” For it is only through living in right relationship with God and with each other that we can ever truly become something. Something from nothing.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

