



# You Gotta Be Kidding Me

*TEXT*  
*Exodus 3:1–6, 9–12*

May 24, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

**E**ven folks who know very little about Judaism know Moses — the man who stood up to Pharaoh; the man who pointed the former slaves through the divided Red Sea. Moses was their leader in the wilderness. Moses introduced the Ten Commandments to the world. Moses is one of the most significant figures in human history, but you wouldn't guess that if the only thing you knew of Moses was his encounter with God in the burning bush.

Moses hears God say, "I have heard the cry of my people; you go tell Pharaoh to let them go."

So, most mornings I watch the morning network news, and there are a lot of commercials. And many are the same commercials every day. There is that guy selling siding who implores you to "call noooooow." And recently there is some guy, an attorney who says, "I've got this." That's his line. "I've got this." It's very macho.

Well, when God calls Moses, he does not respond "I've got this." No, Moses' reaction is, "You've got to be kidding me. You want me to do what? I can't do that. I'm not equipped for that."

It's the first of several excuses. He says, "I don't even know your name. What if they ask me your name? And besides, I can't speak well. You've got the wrong guy. Who am I to do this?"

It's somewhat humorous as Moses tells God that God doesn't know what she's doing. But I'm more than a little sympathetic.

The call of God can be intimidating. Intimidation is a common reaction to the call of God. Jeremiah said, "I can't do this, I'm just a boy."

Isaiah said, "I can't do this, I'm a man of unclean lips."

Even Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane, prayed, "Let this cup pass by me; I do not want what you want."

Oh, the disciples dropped their nets right away when Jesus said, "Follow me," but when they found out where he was going, they put the brakes on.

It's a common reaction because the call of God is not small. The call of God in a variety of ways is to live toward God's promised day, when all that is wrong is made right. It's big and intimidating. Oh, don't let me confuse. It's often lived out in small gestures or decisions. It's like parenting.

Parenting is a long list of "do this, don't do that." "Eat this." "Stop that." "I'm here, it's OK, I'm here." Parenting is periodic huge decisions sandwiched by small daily acts of love, most of them ordinary. But no parent would say the call to be a parent is a small thing. I've never heard a parent say, "I've got this." No, it's intimidating.

Jesus himself calls his followers to do the impossible: Go the second mile. Turn the other cheek. Forgive seventy times seven, and take up our own cross. We never feel equipped for that. I doubt even if God showed up in a burning bush, which so far she has only done once, I doubt even that would change the fact that the call of God feels a bit overwhelming.

Moses says, "Who am I to do this?"

God says, "I'll be with you." That's really what we get. "I call you to participate in the redemption of the world. And I will be with you."

Is that enough? If God calls you to stand up to the pharaohs of the world — to pursue justice; to face the things that have gone wrong and make them right; to heal broken relationships; to be a grown-up in a world in love with immaturity; to sacrifice

something of yourself for the good of a neighbor ... or if Jesus calls you to follow him as he walks by the sea, and when he walks on the sea, and when he walks to the cross; if he calls you to stand up to the pharaohs of the world — and of course that is exactly what God calls you to do — is it enough that God says, “I’ll be with you”?

I don’t know, because I know I’m not equipped. Sometimes I am. Sometimes we get it right. Sometimes we make a real difference. But my problem is consistency — because sometimes, even on the heels of faithfulness, I miss the mark. I mess it up. I don’t always trust myself.

In Wendell Berry’s novel *Jayber Crow*, Jayber is the barber in a small Kentucky town that is breaking down. Jayber reflects on this matter of call. He says, “If you could do it, I suppose, it would be a good idea to live your life in a straight line — starting ... in the Dark [Forest] of [Sin], and proceeding by logical steps through Hell and Purgatory and into Heaven. ... You could take the King’s Highway past appropriately named dangers, toils and snares, and finally cross the River of Death and enter the Celestial City. But that is not the way I have done it, so far. I am a pilgrim, but my pilgrimage has been wandering and unmarked. Often what has looked like a straight line to me has been a circle or a doubling back. I have been in the Dark [Forest] of [Sin] any number of times. I have known something of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven,

but not always in that order. The names of many snares and dangers have been made known to me, but I have seen them only in looking back. ... I am an ignorant pilgrim, crossing a dark valley. And yet for a long time, ... I have been unable to shake off the feeling that I have been led.”<sup>1</sup>

God calls Moses to stand up to Pharaoh. God called Jeremiah to be a prophet. Jesus called fishermen to follow. And the same God who called them calls you to stand up to Pharaoh that the oppressed might go free, to speak the truth in a world where truth decays, and to follow Jesus in every moment.

If you think “I’ve got this,” well you just aren’t paying attention. If you think, “Who am I?” know that God will be with you. But even more than that, the call is not really about you.

God calls because God trusts that together — God and us — we can stand up to Pharaoh, and together we can live toward that promised day when justice rolls down like waters and when swords are beaten into plowshares and when our children grow up to be neither the destroyers nor the destroyed.

God calls you because God refuses to give up on what we can do together. God has been calling us from the first time God called: “Let there be light.”

Moses asked, “Who am I?”

But that’s the wrong question. God says you should ask, “Who is God?”

The call of God is not a statement of how faithful we are, but how persistent God is.

God refuses to give up on what we might do when we trust that God is actually with us.

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<sup>1</sup>Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow*, p. 133

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.