

Making Disciples Who Make Disciples

Ministry year 2021-2022

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

July 31, 2022

TEXT: Luke 10:38-42



Good morning, Beloved. It is an honor to be here to open God's Word. I never get tired of the joy of just opening God's Word. We step across the centuries and we can listen to Jesus teaching. We can watch Him. These words have been faithfully transmitted to us. So, whatever is on your mind so far this morning, or whatever you're bringing this week, I invite you to join me as we listen to Jesus teach. We are in the midst of a year-long series looking at discipleship because that's Jesus' most common term for us, and whether you identify as a disciple this morning, or whether that's something you're considering, you're welcome in this place, and we are all learning together. We are using a working definition of disciples:

*Disciples are committed followers of Jesus
who learn to obey Him over time
and joyfully share Him with others.*

That is a plural noun, "disciples," and discipleship is not a solitary activity. You and I affect each other. Our spouses have a great impact on our spiritual life, and this morning, we are going to look at a passage which highlights for us the role that siblings play. I'm blessed. I have two older sisters. I grew up in a family as the youngest of three, and I consider that to be a jackpot position. I basically had three mothers. I had two older siblings who did things that were commendable and some that were obvious lessons for me of what not to do in the future. You may have siblings; you may not. If you don't have biological siblings, this sermon still applies to you because we are invited in the body of Christ to relate to each other as brothers and sisters. So let's take a look at this text.

Two sisters emerge at the beginning, and we will meet their brother a little bit later in the journey. I want you to think about what Jesus is teaching us in this passage: the profound

impact that we have on each other in our sibling relationships. Our passage starts in Luke 10:38:

“Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.”

We'll find out later that this village is Bethany. Martha is the Aramaic name *Martā*, which means “Mrs.” or “Lord.” It's an affectionate name. It is in Christian language that we use today. We don't have a lot of Aramaic words that we use today, so we have to really savor every one of them. One of the ones we use that's an Aramaic word is the word *Maranatha*. You can see this word in that term as well. So *mar* means Mr. or Lord, and *Maran* means “our Lord,” and *Maranatha* means “come our Lord” as an imperative. It's a great cry of the Christian for the return of Jesus, which we'll talk about together next month. *Martā* is the feminine form of that, which is like “lady.” It is really what her name is, and this lady welcomes Jesus into her home. Hospitality is a deep virtue of the Christian life. All kinds of things happen in homes. I meet with a group of men in our church regularly in our discipleship group, and sometimes we meet in a restaurant. Sometimes we meet in other places, but the times that we've met in homes have been really, really impacting and had a little bit of a different feel.

Martha welcomed Jesus into her home, and then we read that she has a sister whose name is Mary. That's the English version of it. In Hebrew, it's *Miriam*. This is a very popular Jewish name. The first sighting we have of Mary is that Mary was sitting at the Lord's feet listening to His teaching. We will come back to this idiom because it's central to our passage. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His teaching, and Martha gets upset. So, we have a sibling conflict. I don't know if that ever happened in your house when you were growing up, but it happens, doesn't it? Sometimes sibling conflict can just erupt suddenly with no preparation, and it goes all the way to the top.

Some of you remember Michael and Cara Reddy. They had a beloved family. They had more and more children while they were here, and their kids were wonderful and pursued the Lord. The Reddys loved Jesus; their kids loved Jesus. Their youngest son was a very energetic little guy, and he had a scooter. He was on his scooter in the driveway right on the edge of the church parking lot, and we were having a great time talking about global missions. While we were talking, one of his siblings came and put his hand on the scooter, looking like he was going to take the scooter. Out of nowhere, this youngest Reddy looked at his brother and said, “That's my scooter, Stupid!” I thought: “Where did that come from? Does he even know that word?” Sometimes that's what can happen, right? This sibling conflict just erupts, suddenly, before us in Luke 10:40:

“But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’”

Martha is frustrated, and her frustration spills over initially into disbelief: "Lord, do You not care?" Isn't that the expression of the unbelieving heart? "Lord, You don't even care about me." She takes it all away to the top. She is defensive as well: "My sister has left me to serve alone." Finally, she's demanding of Jesus. She looks at Jesus, and she says: "Tell her to help me." It's sort of like when siblings go up to the parents, but this time Martha goes all the way to the top. She goes to the Creator of the universe and says: "My sister is not helping me. You don't care about me, Lord. My sister has abandoned me. And you have got to tell her do something about it!" When we read this, we feel like: "Wow, Martha really has Jesus in a bind!"

Well, Jesus' answer to Martha is very unexpected, and she receives an answer that I think she could never have anticipated. Jesus answers her and says in Luke 10:41:

"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

In the Bible, when God speaks your name twice, it's a signal of intimacy and relationship. We see this when God speaks to Abraham on Mount Moriah and says: "Abraham, Abraham." When the Lord appears to Saul on the road to Damascus, He says: "Saul. Saul." Here He says: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious, you are troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary." One thing in life, Beloved, is absolutely critical. What is that one thing? Jesus tells Martha: "Mary has chosen this one thing. She has chosen the good portion, and that will not be taken away from her." Jesus commends Mary for sitting at His feet and listening to His teaching. This idiom, "to sit at the feet," is an idiom in Judaism that has a very specific meaning. It is not just the posture of finding an available spot. To "sit at the feet" is technical language of discipleship. I want to show you this in the most famous text in rabbinic Judaism. In rabbinic Judaism, the sages and thinkers start reflecting on the Bible, after the end of the Old Testament up through the New Testament era, and their reflections are collected and written down a little after the New Testament time. But the most famous rabbinic treatise is a treatise called *Abot*, which means "fathers." Some of you know I studied this material in part of my doctoral dissertation and work at Hebrew Union College. It's a fascinating document, and I want to share just a couple of the opening verses.

Abot is the most famous and most-known treatise in Judaism outside of the Bible. It's read weekly in the traditional synagogue setting, and everybody knows this. So, let me share with you just the opening. It starts with the chain of tradition in *Abot* 1:1:

"Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be patient in justice, raise many disciples and make a fence round the Torah."

These men of the Great Assembly, or men of the great synagogue, are identified as Ezra and

Nehemiah and the last of the Old Testament prophets, and this is their wisdom, their generational wisdom. You see that disciple-making is of a high value in biblical culture. They said: "Be patient in justice," meaning justice is long in coming. "Raise up lots of disciples and make a fence around the Torah," which is to say basically: "Put the guardrails up so that if you're going to sin, you bump into the guardrails." Aren't you glad for the guardrails? Sometimes you don't appreciate the lack of guardrails until you drive on a Greek island. There is a cliff, and there is no guardrail. You wonder how many people have fallen off.

Let's look at *Abot* 1:2. This verse takes us to the next chain in the transmission, Shimon the Righteous. Shimon the Righteous lived about the time of Alexander the Great, and he received the Scripture. He was one of the last men of the Great Assembly, and he used to say this generational wisdom in one sentence:

"The world stands upon three things: the Torah, the Temple service, and the practice of acts of piety."

Think about what keeps the world going, and that's what he said.

The next generation is a man in *Abot* 1:3, Antigonus, a man of Socho, and here's the first Greek name of a sage in ancient Israel. He used to say:

"Do not be like servants who serve the master in the expectation of receiving a reward, but be like servants who serve the master without the expectation of receiving a reward, and let the fear of Heaven be upon you."

That's his generational wisdom. I'll give you just one more. *Abot* 1:4 gives a pair of teachers for their generation. These two men, Yose ben Yoezer of Zeredah and Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem, lived about 150 BC, just three generations before our Lord. Yose ben Yoezer used to say:

"Let your house be a house of meeting for sages and sit in the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst."

To "sit at the feet" is not just a description of Mary's posture. It's a description of the position of a disciple, of the learner. It's the same idiom that Paul uses in Acts 22:3 when he talks about his growing up. He says:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day."

Do you see that? Most of us can remember our high school teachers. Some of us can remember our middle school teachers. Some of us can even remember our elementary school teachers'

names. Most of us will remember their names, right? How many of us have ever talked about them as: “I sat at the feet of, for example, Mrs. Mylar”? We don’t use that idiom. We talk about where we went to school. We do occasionally mention our teachers’ names. But do you usually mention the two or three things that you learned from each teacher? Maybe you can remember some, but we don’t have that custom. In the biblical culture, there is that custom: You remember their name, and you remember the two or three things you learned from them, which is actually a really valuable thing. But the point of this for us this morning is why it is so surprising. Jesus’ commendation of Mary is that Mary is in the position of a disciple, and as you read in the *Mishnah*, another text, one of the things you will not find is that you will not find the names of any women. All the disciples in the *Mishnah* are men. It’s surprising. Women were not admitted to schools in the Greco-Roman world, and women were typically not admitted as formal students in Judaism, but all the sudden Mary is welcomed as a disciple. Sometimes you hear in the culture that Christianity is somehow against women. The polite thing to say if someone says that is: “Dear friend, you have no idea what you’re talking about.” That’s the polite thing, because actually wherever Christianity has spread in the world, the rights and status and treatment of women actually goes up. We see in this remarkable scene, that Mary is welcomed as a disciple, and that’s true not just for Mary, but women in general are welcome as students and followers of Jesus. They are prominent in the Gospels; they are prominent in the narrative of Acts; they are prominent in Paul’s letters. It is a positive manner in which the early followers of Jesus treated women made a huge impact on the culture.

Does Mary’s posture of discipleship have an effect on her sister? That’s what I want you to ask with me. Where does her discipleship go? Let’s see where it goes. To see where it goes, we turn to the Gospel of John. In John 11, we meet this family again. It is the week before Holy Week, and we read in John 11:1:

“Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.”

Lazarus is the short form of the Hebrew name *Eliezer*, and Lazarus is ill. John tells us that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and their brother Lazarus. Jesus tells the disciples in John 11:11:

“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”

The disciples respond in John 11:12:

“Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”

Then Jesus tells them plainly in John 11:14-15:

“Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Suddenly we are brought in when Jesus says surprisingly: *"I'm glad I was not there, so that you may believe."* We get to John 11:20, Jesus is coming again to Bethany. and we see a surprise. We see that Martha heard that Jesus was coming, and Martha went and met Him. Martha goes out first, this time, to meet Jesus, and Martha has a discipleship encounter with Jesus. Mary stayed back in the house. Martha came to Jesus and said to Jesus in John 11:20:

"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You."

Jesus says to her: *"Your brother will rise again."* Martha says: *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection of the last day,"* articulating that unique hope of the Bible that we will be raised. And Jesus says to her in John 11:25-26, one of His most dramatic declarations in the Gospels:

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

This is one of the most comforting sentences in the Bible: *"I am the resurrection and the life."* Martha says to Jesus, honoring Him by calling Him Lord, in John 11:27:

"Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Martha confesses faith in Jesus as Lord, as Messiah, as Son of God. Martha articulates the great confession of faith that is the climax and purpose of John's whole writing. It is Martha who expresses that here. Did Mary's faith and posture of sitting at the feet of Jesus as a disciple affect her sister? Absolutely! Are you and I sometimes knuckleheads who put up barriers for our siblings? Absolutely! But can you, can I, have a dramatic and powerful effect on our siblings if we resolve to prioritize discipleship? Absolutely! Mary chose Jesus and His words as her priority, and it affected her sister.

The next time we see them, it's her sister who is running out ahead. Mary comes eventually. She came to where Jesus was, and when she saw Him, she fell at His feet, loving to be at the feet of Jesus. She says the same thing that Martha said: *"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."* and she began to weep. And when Jesus saw her weeping, He was deeply moved, and He asked: *"Where have you laid him?"* They said: *"Lord, come and see."* And we read in John 11:35: *"Jesus wept."* This is the shortest verse in the New Testament in English—just two words. It's three words in the original text. (The shortest verse in the New Testament in the original text is 1 Thessalonians 5:16: *"Rejoice always."*) *"Jesus wept,"* and there stands Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and everyone is wondering why He is weeping. The people who had gathered around for the funeral saw Jesus weeping and thought it was evidence of His compassion and love for this family. They said in John 11:36: *"See how He loved him."* That is true, but it's not sufficient to explain the tears of Jesus. Others

said in John 11:37:

“Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

It raised questions for them.

John, though, tells us that Jesus, deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone against it. Jesus looked at this tomb, distinctive, rock-hewn tomb, and here is Jesus, the Son of



God, staring at a distinctive tomb a week before He Himself will be laid in one just like it. He is looking at this tomb a week before He will be laid in it after carrying the sin of the world. I think that's why He is weeping. He is weeping because He sees what is coming for Himself, and Jesus says what He anticipates the Father

will say on His behalf a week later. Jesus says in John 11:39: *“Take away the stone.”* People were astonished, and yet they rolled the stone away, and Jesus lifted His eyes to the Father, communing with the Father, knowing what's coming for Him a week later, and He says in John 11:31:

“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.”

And then Jesus cries out with a loud voice. This is the only time in John's Gospel that Jesus cries out with a loud voice in His public ministry. The next time He will cry out with a loud voice will be when He is hanging on the cross, and here, standing before the tomb, He cries out in a loud voice and says in John 11:43:

“Lazarus, come out.”

Can you imagine, the Son of God, ready to carry your sin and mine, ready to be slain and buried and laid in a tomb like this, awaiting the Father's word: “Roll back to stone!” which the Father will tell the angel to do? But the father will speak in a week to His beloved Son: “Come out!” Lazarus hears Jesus and he comes out. He comes out of the tomb, still wearing the grave clothes. It's Jesus' greatest miracle of His ministry.

Where does Mary's commitment to discipleship go? It floods over into her sister who runs to meet Jesus. It floods over to her brother who hears Jesus summon him from the grave. Beloved, do you have an impact on your brothers and sisters? Absolutely! How do you have this impact? The greatest way we impact the people around us is by prioritizing Jesus in our lives and resolving that Jesus is my first priority and I will adopt the posture of discipleship—wanting to hear His words. Your brothers and your sisters will see that and it will affect them. Sometimes it

affects them in weeks or months, but often it affects them over years and sometimes decades. I'm so grateful for my two older sisters. All of us grew up not knowing Jesus. And maybe that's true in your family, but when God was pleased to reveal His Son to me and my discipleship journey began, it came with the great privilege of leading my middle sister to Christ myself. What a privilege. My oldest sister came to Christ later, and now all of us are serving Jesus. We have affected each other's discipleship. My middle sister, Lynley, is gifted with compassion. She has been through much suffering, and so she is a very empathetic counselor and welcomes the broken nearby her. She's gifted in music and worship. My oldest sister, Holly, is dedicated to serving others. She is also someone who is resolved to study the words of Jesus. She's been one of the most inspirational models for me of how to lose a child and yet use that as a platform for ministry. I love them both, and they love me, and we spur each other on.

The challenge for all of us in this text, in this storyline, is to prioritize discipleship. I want to invite you to be a person about whom other people would notice you "sit at the feet" of Jesus. We all select our disciples at one level, sometimes passively. We're all being shaped and formed by what we read and what we listen to. Is Jesus the dominant voice in your life? Are His words, the words you drink in with thirst? Do you rush to get His perspective and need His presence in every situation? If so, let that affect the lives around you. It happens quite naturally by His presence. Disciple-makers are those who prioritize discipleship in their own lives, and they let that affect their sibling relationships. It also means that disciple-makers, when there is conflict among our siblings, seek to resolve that. The conflict that happens at the beginning of our passage is a distant memory when we get to John 11, and the last time we see the family together in John 12, they are again having a banquet dinner for Jesus. Martha is serving gladly. Lazarus is reclining at the table, and Martha is anointing Jesus' feet again. I imagine that they never stopped talking about that time when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

When we get together as a family, we tell stories. I'm the designated family storyteller, and the younger kids know that when Uncle Dave is going to start telling stories, it's time for everyone to come around. Some of the stories are funny, like the time that we forgot to tell my Uncle Tom that when you swing on the rope swing out over the lake, you have to lift your legs up at the last minute because of the railroad ties there at the bottom. That's a funny story. It wasn't funny for Uncle Tom who didn't know that you have to lift your legs up at the bottom, but some of them are very funny. The best stories are the stories where we talk about what God has done in our lives and how He is growing our faith. I imagine that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus never stopped talking when they got together: "Do you remember that time when Jesus called me out of the grave?" That's the best story.

I want to challenge you to influence your family members for Jesus, to pray for them, to be

quick to resolve a conflict. Don't be pushy or aggressive, just prioritize disciple-making in your life and let it have its effect, and it will have an effect sometimes in one year, sometimes five, sometimes 10 or 20, but oh what a sweetness it is. Never give up on seeking that all of your brothers and sisters will be with you serving and walking with Jesus. Let's pray now, and I want to invite you to pray with me. I want you to pray for your siblings right now as we pray.

Lord Jesus, You are good and You are powerful, and, Lord, You teach us every step of the way. We thank You this morning for this passage where we see You meeting with sisters and later their brother. Lord, now we bring our earthly brothers and sisters before You. Lord, we mention their names in our hearts. We bring them before Your throne, and we ask Your blessing. Father, I thank You for my sister, Holly, and I ask You to bless her right now. I thank You for my sister, Lynley, and I ask that You would bless her right now. I ask Lord, that Your great purposes in their lives would advance, that their discipleship would be rich and deep and lasting. Lord, I thank You that You have saved us all. Lord, we bring together before Your throne our earthly brothers and sisters who do not yet know You, and we ask that You allow Yourself to be seen, known, and believed by every one of them. Lord, we ask that You would help us to prioritize sitting at Your feet. Give us opportunities to pray for them, share with them, and to tell the stories of what You have done. Lord, in Your grace and mercy, allow us to experience the resurrection of the dead together. You bring us alive through faith in You, and on that great and final day you will call all of us to come out from the grave. Lord, in anticipation of that day, we worship You now, and we thank You for Your presence among us.

In Jesus' powerful Name, Amen.