

## “Discipleship”

**Sermon preached by Elder Pat Youther  
Kirkmont Presbyterian Church  
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Text: Luke 10:38-42  
#6 in a Series of 10**

Please pray with me: God of grace and God of glory—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—please fill this time to overflowing with you. May we be aware of your presence with us. In Jesus’ name we pray it. Amen.

Our Scripture today is Luke 10:38-42: As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

### **What is a disciple?**

I want you to get the picture here. I think that we often think of Biblical times and events in terms of our own experiences here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, rather than in the time and place and culture in which they occurred. So let’s try to take this out of our context and put it into its own context.

Don’t think of a three-bedroom suburban home. Think instead of a first-century home in a village in Israel. It would have probably one or two rooms made of mud brick with a dirt floor. It would probably also have just one story unless the family had overnight guests on a lower level—oh, those “guests” would be the animals belonging to the family. We’re not talking dogs and cats either; think sheep and goats and donkeys.

Don’t think of food being prepared in a modern kitchen with all the latest conveniences and granite countertops. Consider instead preparing a meal out of doors, and I don’t mean on a gas grill. Don’t think of zipping over to Kroger’s to pick up a tray of cold cuts and some chips to feed unexpected guests. Think instead of grinding your own grain for bread and preparing the meal totally from scratch. No mixes, no microwaves, and no electricity.

Don’t think of Jesus and His disciples piling out of a Suburban or a Hummer when they arrived. Instead remember that they walked everywhere and they had just walked out to Bethany from Jerusalem, a hike of about two miles.

And remember over all this the overwhelming importance of hospitality in the Middle East; even today that is true.

So now, in that context, Jesus and an unspecified number of disciples show up in Bethany at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. What **is** a hostess to do? Well, even today, even here in casual America, we want to be thought of as hospitable. Don’t we? So we clean and we

prepare good food and we attempt to make our guests comfortable and welcome. I personally have been known to become a tyrant in preparation for the moment of opening the door and saying, “Hellooo! I’m so glad you’re here.”

So I’m figuring that Martha must have gone into overdrive to welcome Jesus and His disciples. As she rushes to make all the preparations, she looks around for Mary’s help. And she discovers Mary sitting at the Master’s feet. Sitting! Sitting—when there is work to be done. Martha complains to Jesus about this situation. She asks Jesus for relief. She asks Jesus to agree with her plan and her solution. (Does any of this sound familiar?) Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help her.

I think Martha may have found Jesus’ response less than satisfying. He diagnoses her condition as being worried and upset about many things. Then He goes a step further and tells her that Mary has made the better choice and it will not be taken away from her. He says that Mary has chosen the one thing that is needed.

Get this picture in your mind: Martha is zipping around and Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet. Now this idiom is not just descriptive of Mary’s posture. “Sitting at a Rabbi’s feet” indicated that the person was a disciple of the Rabbi. A disciple is a student, a learner, a follower.

Let me take a moment to describe the system in which a Rabbi and his disciples operated. Boys would attend synagogue school, starting at about the age of five. As they progressed through their studies and grew older, some boys would recognize that a life of study was not for them. They would go on to learn a skill or a trade. But some would feel the pull to become a rabbi. Those young men would seek out a rabbi and ask him if they could become one of his disciples, one of his students. The rabbi would allow such a young man to spend some time with him, while the rabbi sized him up. The rabbi would determine the disciple’s future. Not everyone could become a disciple.

But for those who made the cut, for those who became a rabbi’s disciple, they tried to spend as much time as possible with the rabbi. They wanted to learn not only the knowledge the rabbi possessed but they wanted to learn how to be as much like their rabbi as they could. They didn’t want to miss a minute with him, for he might say or do something they would want to know. The rabbi might say a prayer that they needed to know. The rabbi might make a decision in such a way that they would be able to use it in the future. The rabbi might teach on a piece of the Scripture that the disciple would want to understand better. So the disciple followed the rabbi everywhere as closely as possible. In fact, there was a Jewish blessing, “May you always be covered by the dust of your rabbi.” In other words, may you follow your rabbi so closely that the very dust that he kicks up covers you.

However, notice the gender here. It was male only. Young Jewish girls stayed at home and learned household skills and how to implement the laws the boys were learning by heart. But girls were not disciples. Until Jesus came. Jesus upended the status quo over and over and over again.

Jesus’ disciples did not come to Him and ask if they could follow Him. Jesus sought out His disciples and told them, “Come! Come and see! Follow me!” He chose His own disciples, and He didn’t choose the scholars or the church leaders. He chose fishermen, a tax collector, a religious zealot, and even the man who would betray Him. He continued to upend the status quo; He not only chose His own disciples, He chose unlikely men; He had a woman as a disciple. Rabbis did not have female disciples. But Jesus did.

## **How do we be disciples?**

In looking at the story of Mary & Martha, we miss the point if we think that Jesus condemned activity and commended only a contemplative life. He did not say that we are only being disciples if we sit around and gaze heavenward. So what did He say? How do we be disciples? What was it He was criticizing in Martha's behavior and praising in Mary's?

He told Martha that she was worried and upset about many things; in fact, she's described as "distracted." Martha was distracted by all the preparations. What things distract us from the one thing that's needed? How about gas prices? Housing prices? Interest rates? Stocks going up? Stocks going down? Taxes? Wars and rumors of wars? A two-year-long election process? Children? Parents? Illness? Disease? Healthcare costs? Contaminated food? Contaminated pet food? The 24-hour news cycle? "What's for dinner?" Tornadoes? Flooding? Hurricanes? Threats of global warming? Asteroids? Household repairs? Our families? Our neighbors? Our friends? Job concerns? The future? The past? Ever-present technology? Ever-present technology that we can't figure out? The good opinions of others? The bad opinions of others? Terrorism? What will Jack Bauer blow up next on *24*? Have I given you enough possible distractions?

All these things—and more—concern us. Yet Jesus calls us to focus. This is hard for me because I'm a person who likes to multitask.

But I do have an example of successfully focusing. Many of you know that Charlie fell from our roof on November 18. He broke himself pretty severely. He had surgery four days after his fall on the 22nd. His surgery was two days before Thanksgiving. Our daughter, Kate, and I put our heads together to figure out a Thanksgiving celebration, knowing that Charlie would still be in the hospital. The plan we came up with was to ask Charlie what one thing he'd like for his Thanksgiving dinner. Then we'd make it, bring it to his hospital room, and feast on that one thing.

I'm not sure how great a plan that was, considering Charlie's then-dependence on painkillers. But we put the plan into action and asked him. He gave us a concise answer. "Pie." That was doable since I wasn't sure how I'd smuggle in a 20-pound turkey.

I'm the pie-maker in the family so it fell to me to prepare our Thanksgiving feast of "Pie." I chose to make an apple pie because we all like it. I can say, without too much pride and with truthfulness, that I make a pretty good apple pie. I brought proof of that this morning. Here is a freshly-baked apple pie. You'll be glad to know that this is not the same one as the one I made for Thanksgiving.

Because I didn't have to prepare any other food, because I was home alone, and because I wanted to make the very best apple pie I could, I was fully concentrated on that pie. I make my crust from scratch. I use Granny Smith apples—all crisp and tart. I season it with cinnamon and a touch of nutmeg. (Are you salivating yet?) I baked it just right. I carefully wrapped it up, nestled it in a basket, and took it down to the hospital. Charlie and Kate claim it was **the** very best apple pie I've ever made. I think there are two reasons for that; I filled it with love and I was totally focused on it. I wasn't thinking about all those things that distract me.

So what is our focus to be as Jesus' disciples? For what did Jesus commend Mary? He said that Mary was concentrated on one thing. What is the one thing? Relationship. Discipleship is about Relationship!

Scripture is chockfull of commands that instruct us how to live as disciples. Here's a sampling (Romans 12:10-18):

- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.
- Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.
- Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
- Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
- Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
- Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
- Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.
- If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Sounds overwhelming, doesn’t it? And this is just from a small portion of the book of Romans. But Jesus boiled it down for us into what we now call The Greatest Commandment: Mark 12:29-31, “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

## **Conclusion**

Jesus upended the expectations of people and the status quo of the first century. He chose unlikely men. He called women to be disciples in a time when such conduct was outrageous. Jesus continues to upend expectations; He continues to overturn the status quo. He calls you—and you—and you—and me to “Come! Come and see! Follow me!”

Discipleship is about Relationship. If you’re pretty sure that you don’t have a discipleship relationship with Jesus and you feel Him calling you to that relationship, Pastor Carmen or I or any of our elders would love to talk with you about it.

If you are His disciple, then may you always be covered with the dust of your Rabbi, Jesus.

Amen!