Sure. Maybe your dad will take offence; maybe your mom will hang-up on you. Maybe your family will tell you to “get out”; maybe they won’t speak to you again - it could be that they’ll treat you with the same disdain as they treat the one you follow - “a disciple is not above the teacher; nor an apprentice above the master”\(^1\) - and if they call the master possessed by evil, they’ll call you evil, too.\(^2\)

But you can’t be two-faced; you can’t have it both ways; go about living a double-life; following the teacher out-and-about while keeping quiet and maintaining the peace at home. You have to be who you are, you have to live with integrity, Jesus says - that was his hard teaching last week, words that I’m sure you remember - “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword\(^3\) and “whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven”\(^4\)

In this Missionary Discourse, the 10th Chapter of Matthew’s Gospel we’ve been reading for three weeks, the Evangelist tells us the story of when Jesus gathered his twelve closest friends and sent them out to do missionary work not way out there in the world, but among the people they knew - the people of their own communities in Israel. It’s in that context that Matthew’s Jesus tells his followers that their devotion to him and the message of Good News may well cause rifts within their most intimate relationships - mamma may not be happy that you’re preaching the Gospel; daddy may think you’ve gone outta your mind; but Jesus focuses them on what is more important than what people think and how they react to change: what is more important is what God is up to, God’s kingdom coming - “Do not be afraid,”\(^5\) Jesus tells them.

Well, that seems all well and good, doesn’t it? Do not be afraid. So we’re supposed to risk our social standing, our place of dignity, our best friendships and dearest relationships for the sake of the gospel? We’re supposed to look like fools; be labelled zealots; mocked and isolated for God’s sake? And we know the world hasn’t changed all that much - the Good News of Jesus Christ, the News that the last will be first, and the least the greatest,\(^6\) the poor are blessed;\(^7\) and the hungry and thirsty will be nourished; the stranger welcomed; the naked clothed; the sick healed; the imprisoned set free;\(^8\) that the entire way we do

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\(^{1}\) Matthew 10:24. I soften “slave” here to “apprentice” for rhetorical purposes.
\(^{2}\) Cf. Matthew 10:25 - Beelzebul refers, in Jesus’ context, to the Lord of the Demons - literally Lord of the Flies - the Devil, so to speak. See http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t04/c242
\(^{3}\) ibid. 10:34.
\(^{4}\) ibid. 10:33.
\(^{5}\) ibid. 10:31.
\(^{6}\) ibid. 19:41.
\(^{7}\) ibid. 5:3.
\(^{8}\) ibid. 25:31-46.
things, the way we think the world has to work, the labels we put on people and the oppressions we wield against ourselves and others are foundationally opposed to the way God dreams the world will work: that God’s dream-horizon is not so much what could be but what will be, what is indeed, even if we are still too afraid to get on board:

It’s a scary thought, what God’s kingdom might actually demand of us. But do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid. Even when mamma and daddy think you’re insane; when you’re no longer invited to the family picnic; or certain people turn-in and snicker when you come around; people are gonna talk, they’re gonna talk: but amid the crowds who may close their ears and hearts; among your nearest and dearest who may shun you there will be someone - even if it's just one - who really needs to hear the Good News, whose heart will be touched, whose mind will be opened, whose life will be saved; who will glimpse the Risen Lord in you, who will not lose the reward: that is what today’s Gospel says, at the end of the gloom of the middle of Matthew’s Missionary Discourse. It says: there will be some who need what you have to share, they need the Gospel, they’ll be the ones to receive you, and you can’t base your witness - you can’t base your mission - on the prospect of those who might reject it: go anyway. Go for the handful who will receive you, because, dear ones, when someone does offer you that cup of water to quench your thirst, when they offer you refreshment on your journey in thanksgiving for the News you have proclaimed to them, they are not only offering it to you, they are offering it to Christ himself, and the one who sent Christ.

So how do you get started? Go out of here. Go out like our youth who are going to Harlan, Kentucky today to build homes for the poor. Go out after you have feasted at this Table. Go out and go the extra mile; turn the other cheek; when they want your coat, give them the shirt off your back, too; give to everyone who begs from you; love your enemies.⁹ Hold nothing more dear than the love of God which is equal and overflowing for every person everywhere.

And you too shall be a sign of God’s presence in the world. “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”¹⁰

Do not be afraid: “you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.”¹¹

Additional Work Consulted


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⁹ These are arguably the central tenets enjoined by the Gospel, at least from Jesus’ own teachings. Cf. Matthew 5:41, 5:39, 5:40, 5:42, 5:44. See the work of the Jesus Seminar (taking its foibles with its strengths) for suggestions on the original sayings of Jesus: https://www.westar institute.org/projects/the-jesus-seminar/jesus-seminar-phase-I-sayings-of-jesus/.
¹⁰ ibid. 10:40.
¹¹ I Corinthians 3:23.