

12th May – Dangerous Faith – Call me a Christian – Acts 11:19-30

The church in Antioch

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

1. A commentator has said that this passage's 'encouragement to call ourselves Christians arises from the recognition of a unique identity, centred on Christ. By adopting this term, believers align themselves with the teachings and person of Jesus, embracing a broader, inclusive community that transcends cultural and religious boundaries. The term 'Christian' signifies a commitment to Christ as Lord and Saviour, acknowledging His transformative power, and the shared identity of those who follow Him.'

Go through the statement above, word by word and phrase by phrase. How do each of its parts deepen our understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a 'Christian'?

What implications does calling ourselves 'Christians' have for us as individuals, at St Paul's, and as the worldwide Church?

If people who have never heard of Jesus look at how we live, what would you hope they'd see that would show them what Jesus is like, even before we tell them about him? And what would you hope they wouldn't see?

2. Go to opendoorsuk.org and open the menu. Select 'About', select 'What We Do'. Read the summary under the heading 'How your support changes lives', and then each of the subheadings and the type underneath, which explains how each aspect of the organisation's work helps persecuted Christians. Choose one or two subheadings to explore, then pray for those working on behalf of Open Doors, and for those they are supporting.

PRAY – Father, help us to not only call ourselves Christians, but to live up to that name