

## Called Christians

April 27, 2021 Scott Gunn

*So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”* — Acts 11:26b

I love many things about the Book of Acts. It’s the story of how a few Jewish followers of rabbi Jesus develop into something we can recognize as the church, as distinctive from Judaism, as disciples following their Lord Jesus. And the Holy Spirit figures prominently in making it all happen.

Back in Acts 8, we read how persecution broke out, forcing the disciples to leave the familiar surroundings of Jerusalem and travel to other places. The Gospel took hold in Samaria, of all places! Over the course of the Book of Acts, we see that the faith of Jesus is opened not just to the Jews but to Gentiles as well.

Some disciples have made their way to Antioch (in present-day Turkey). They are there precisely because the persecution in Jerusalem pushed them out into the countryside, to nearby cities, and eventually to the wider Mediterranean world. It takes a while to plant a church, and so the disciples linger for a whole year of preaching and teaching.

The followers of Jesus in Antioch are called Christians. Christians: followers of Christ.

We’ve kept the name, because we follow Christ Jesus our Lord. Sometimes I wonder if my life would be worthy of a given descriptive name like that. Is there anything about my overall life that would lead someone to brand me a Christian, either in derision or admiration?

Some years ago, I was in Zanzibar during Ramadan. My mostly Muslim hosts took good care of me, and they made sure I got a good lunch even though they were fasting. They interrupted their days as needed to pray. Their dress was distinctive. I would know they were Muslim even if they hadn’t told me.

Then I look at myself. Other than some time on Sunday morning, would a stranger see in my life something that would mark me as a Christian? I don’t dress distinctively (unless I happen to have on my clergy shirt). I don’t usually interrupt my day with visible prayers. Do I have other patterns of behavior that a stranger would recognize to mark me as a follower of Jesus?

The song says, “and they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” But will they? Do we in the church love each other in such a powerful and distinctive way that a total stranger could tell we are Christians?

In this Easter season, I hope to make my life so recognizably Christian that a stranger would see that I follow the Risen Lord. This disciple wants to be called “Christian.”