

Cheeseheads

In one of the states in our country's Midwestern region, there are a number of people who go out of the house with large foam sculptures resembling Swiss cheese wedges on their heads. These people are called Cheeseheads, and if someone is a Cheesehead, you know something about them. They love the Green Bay Packers football team. In fact, they love the Packers so much that they subject themselves to the indignity of those odd foam hats in order to be identified as someone that loves the Packers (in some cases, Packers fans have even been known to paint their house green and gold or name their son Brett).

In Acts chapter 11, the residents of Antioch began to observe a new group form that displayed odd behavior and identified themselves as "one of them" that followed "the Way." The residents of this town called the new group "Christians." This new group was known as a radical community who cared for people including those they had never met. This week, we will look at how the early followers of Christ came to be called Christians and what they meant by it.

Monday – The Importance of a Name

1. Please read Genesis 17:1-8, Genesis 32:22-32 and Acts 13:9. What do Abram, Jacob and Saul all have in common?
2. What do you think the name change signifies?
3. In some Christian denominations, Christians select a new name at baptism. If you were to choose a new name that signified a dramatic change in your relationship with God, what would it be? Why?

Digging Deeper – Take a quick look at Revelation 2:17. What do you think of the idea that Jesus has a new cosmic name for "those who overcome?"

Tuesday – What are we going to Call these People?

"The pagans of Antioch knew all about these people for they did not keep quiet about their faith...one Antiochene would (likely say to another)... Oh, these are the people who are always talking about Christos, the Christ People, the Christians." F. F. Bruce - The Book of Acts

1. Please Read Acts 1:16, 6:1, 9:2, 9:13, 9:31, 10:45, 11:26 and make a list of the things that those who associated themselves with Jesus and his followers were called.
2. What does each of these labels say about you and the community of faith?

Making it Personal – How do you respond to people when they ask you, "What is your religion?"

Wednesday – It Happened One Day in Antioch

"Barnabas' next action was to go 'to Tarsus to look for Saul'... Some commentators suggest that during (the 8 years since Paul had been mentioned) he suffered some of the physical persecutions to which he later referred, and was disinherited by his family. We cannot help admiring Barnabas' humility in wanting to share the ministry with Saul, and his sense of strategy also. He must have known Saul's calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles." John Stott - Acts

1. Please Read Acts 11:19-30. Why do you think Barnabas sought out Paul (who was still a bit of a mystery to the believers in Jerusalem at this point) to help him with the work in Antioch? What lesson is there in this observation for your life and ministry in FBC?
2. What sorts of things did Barnabas and Paul do while in Antioch?
3. Most of the inhabitants of Antioch were Gentiles (non-Jews). If the word "Christ" means Messiah to the Jewish mind, why would it make sense that the term Christian would first be used outside of the Jewish culture?

Thursday – What is a Christian?

"...for the Gentiles would have looked at these followers of 'the Way' and said, they are the Christ-ones. They are trying to be like Jesus." James Montgomery Boice - Acts

1. Please Read Acts 11:26. What is a Christian? Are you one? Look at Matthew 7:15-20. How do these verses help answer the question: 'What is a Christian?'
2. Based on what we have seen in Acts so far, what characteristics would cause a first century resident of Antioch to identify someone as a Christian?

Making it Personal – Are you comfortable using the term Christian to describe yourself? Why or why not?

Friday – What it Might Look Like

"Nowadays we can become or live as Christians in the most pleasant way and without ever risking the slightest possibility of offense. All we have to do is start with the status quo and observe good virtues (good-better-best). We can continue to make ourselves comfortable by scraping together the world's goods, as long as we stir into the pot what is Christian as a seasoning, an ingredient that almost serves to refine our enjoyment of life. This kind of Christianity is but a religious variation of the world's unbelief, a movement without budging from the spot. That is to say, it is a simulated motion."

Søren Kierkegaard - Practice in Christianity (written in the early 1800's)

1. Please Read Galatians 5:16-26. FBC highlights 30 beliefs, practices and virtues that we talk about as "core competencies" of the Christian experience (listed on the other side of this sheet). This helps us to begin to understand what a Christian looks like. Look over them. Which of them do you see illustrated in the book of Acts so far?
2. What picture does Galatians 5 give us regarding what a Christian looks like?
3. Look at verses 6:7-10. What do these verses say about cultivating a genuine Christian life? What do you think it means to "sow to the Spirit?"

For the Weekend: Review the passages from Tuesday and look over the 30 beliefs, practices and virtues. Pray that God will help you with one of these and do the same for a friend. Look over Acts 16:22-34 in preparation for next week's sermon.