

Holy Clique

“Let’s have a club.”

Romans 12:9-18

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Club Dearborn

The year was 1974 and the place was Dearborn, Michigan. I had been serious about my faith for over a year and I wanted to prove that my church was as Christian and spiritual as Laura’s Baptist Church on the east side of town and the Methodist Church in Livonia with the evening service and young adult group we attended on Sunday evenings. So I found out there was a Sunday morning adult Bible study and decided to attend it. I just walked in one morning, Bible in hand, and took a seat. A few people turned around to look at me as I settled in. I looked back and noticed that it seemed like there were a lot of older people there.

People who were my grandmother’s age.

But a study book was passed my way and the class leader welcomed me and asked me to introduce myself. And it turned out to be interesting. I was learning some good stuff; and I wasn’t shy about taking part in the discussion; and it seemed like the other people let me talk and liked having me there. After the class a few people even said they did and the invited me to come back.

When I told my mother where I went, she was stunned. “You went to where?” I told her again. “The one that meets in the parlor?” That was the one.

She just shook her head.

Then she shared an impression that I guess most other people in the church had but of which I had been unaware. “People in that class don’t let anyone younger than 60 join them,” she said. “Not even some people who are older than 60. How did you get in?”

I guess I didn’t know what I was doing. But I had crashed some kind of club meeting.

Club 320

Jesus had a club. The Bible says that he was pretty selective about who he invited in. At least he was selective about those who are considered members of his inner circle of twelve or so. He chose them – called them by name and said, “Come, follow me.” He watched Peter and Andrew and John and James as they cleaned their fishing nets and said, “Come, follow me and you’ll be fishers of people;” and they dropped their nets and left them behind in order to be with him. He walked up to a tax collector and said it again. He gathered them all and you might say they had a club.

Wherever he went, they went. They all took care of each other. They’d enter villages and they’d find some water, maybe they’d collect some food and find a place to stay. They watched him and learned from him – they took in what he taught, asked him for a way to pray, and watched how he laid his hands on people who were broken and discouraged and brought healing.

Once they learned it all well enough, they started doing it. And when they got the hang of it well enough, he even sent them out on their own, two-by-two, and had them make announcements about the kingdom of God happening and gave them authority to heal and chase away evil. This was no consumer club, in which the members just came to get something and be done with it. It was a club for participants. They caught on to what Jesus was doing, and they started doing it too. That’s what it meant to belong. The Bible said Jesus went about doing good; and *now they were doing good, too*.

They had a club. A holy clique: and their clique was about knowing God’s love and loving God and sharing that love with each other and everyone else they could. Lots of people started following them and it turns out, everyone was invited – anyone could join.

Clubs are known for something that makes them special. Lions Clubs are known for taking care of vision needs and caring for people who are blind. Sewing clubs are for people who sew. Wood carvers gather together in their cliques and exchange what they know about using gouges and knives as they swap tales and opinions and make messes with wood chips.

What if we had a club?

This is what it could be like. We could decide that our love would be genuine: that is, we would love each other and everyone else we can without any conditions. And for it to be genuine, we could do our best not to be hypocrites about it: genuine love would be based on doing good like Jesus and the first Jesus Club did.

Wouldn't it be fun to compete over showing honor to each other? That is, our club could be about not jumping to conclusions and thinking the worst about one another; but assuming that everyone is doing the best they can and has the best of intentions. So we respect each other and ask questions instead of sinking into cycles of blame. THAT would make us different, wouldn't it?

We could be a club in which club members would encourage each other to be passionate about loving God and taking God's compassion to others. We could practice things like building up hope; we could care for each other so the suffering any of us experience becomes bearable and not overwhelming. We could make our club a group that practices talking with God and about God a lot.

Our club could be a group of people taking care for each other and gain a reputation of always having an open place in our hearts for others to come. We'd be welcoming to everyone – we'd be known for great hospitality.

And we could be so good at doing good that instead of getting back at people who do things like put atheist advertisements on the sides of busses, we'd just love them and find ways to be kind to them; and if someone asks, we'd just say "that's what Jesus would do. We're that kind of club."

We'd share joy over others' successes and sit with those who are sad and even share a tear with them. We could do our best to be one team and not a bunch of competing sub-groups; not be arrogant; and consider going to the poorest and most vulnerable people around and letting them know they are welcome at our table any time. All the time. In that way we'd try to live at peace with everyone, to the fullest extent our influence could make it be.

That's what our club could be like. Perhaps we could call our club: *Church*.

And, actually, that's what our club is like; at least it's the ideal to which our club aspires.

Our study book this Lent tells us that the second rule John Wesley told us Jesus said to practice is simply "Do good."

It's something that the author says is pretty hard to do, even though it sounds so simple.¹ But there's something about being part of a club, in this case: a holy clique; that empowers each of us to reach for our best self.

A Holy Clique

The Senior Adult Bible Study in Dearborn let me stay, you know. I stayed for the next year until I went to seminary. Actually, they took me right in. More-or-less, they kind of adopted me. They kept on letting me voice my opinions. They didn't hesitate to voice theirs. And one time the teacher who had been teaching that class for maybe twice as long as I was old, went out-of-town over a weekend and he asked me to teach it. Still to the astonishment of my mother and others in the church, they made me belong

And when I was living far away and attending school, I received an envelope from the class in the mail. In it was a gift, kind of a little scholarship they wanted me to have, that came from a collection they took to let me know they still thought of me. They still cared.

I was in the Club.

And that Club was also Church.

You and I together have a club. And our club can be known for outdoing one another in showing honor and genuine love. We can do good together, because we are Jesus Church.

¹ Ruben Job, *Three Simple Rules*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 2007. p 43.