

## Christ's Church on Offense

✠ **Knowing Jesus (vv.13-17)**

✠ **Giving Forgiveness (vv.18-20)**

In the name of Jesus, our valiant Commander and Savior, dear confessors of Christ:

It's interesting to read ancient liturgies to see what God's people were praying. There were many petitions for deliverance from the Turks, called Muslims today. Prayers for deliverance from the Vikings were not for cheese and meat packers across the border, but what we call terrorists today. There were prayers for protection from the Pope's armies as western Crusaders did more harm to Christians of the Eastern Church than to Muslims in the Holy Land. Christians begged for deliverance from the Spanish Inquisition when Rome imprisoned thousands who could not prove they were not Muslim or Jewish.

Heresies on the inside, enemies without – sometimes it seems the Church is losing. Should we build high walls to hide? Jesus promises, *“the gates of hell will not prevail against”* His Church. Gates are defensive, which means we're on offense. Coaches and generals have noted, “The best defense is a good offense.” Since *“the gates of hell will not prevail against”* **Christ's Church**, all rests on...

✠ **Knowing Jesus (vv.13-17)**

*“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”* Jesus liked that title, *“the Son of Man,”* because it connected Him to Old Testament prophecy and to all mankind. Our Savior is our Brother.

The world's religions and Jewish tradition are represented here. *“Some say John the Baptist”* – beheaded by Herod only weeks before. *“Others say Elijah”* – famous Old Testament prophet soon to appear with Jesus on the mount of His Transfiguration. *“Still others, Jeremiah”* – possibly representing all the *“prophets.”* Which is where you find the world's religions. They put a shiny little sticker on Jesus as if calling Him, “Prophet,” is an honor. Meanwhile they claim one of their guys is the main Prophet with the last word from God. Yet the Holy Spirit says, *“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”* (Hebrews 1:1f NIV)

Right away Jesus turns to His disciples and to us: *“But what about you?...Who do you say I am?”* Not your Grandma, not your parents, *“What about you?”* Come the Judgment Day, each of us will stand before God alone. It won't help to say, “I used to be a member of New Life in Shoreview with the beautiful round window above the altar.” Unless the message has hold of your heart, what good is it?

Speaking for the other disciples, Peter showed he had been listening to Jesus. He'd seen the miracles. No doubt about it: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Jesus gives pure commendation: *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man....”* Don't ask the media. Modern mockers and scoffing comedians don't have a clue. Jesus says, *“This was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”* As Jesus' Apostle Paul puts it: *“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* (1 Corinthians 12:3) **Knowing Jesus** is a miracle. It defies the brightest minds and humbles human reason. But it shines brightly in the eyes and heart of little children. **Knowing Jesus** you enjoy peace that surpasses all understanding that guards your heart and mind through faith in Christ. It keeps you **on Offense** without being offensive. We want to keep...

✠ **Giving Forgiveness (vv.18-20)**

Rome still uses the next verses to claim the Pope is Christ's substitute on earth, the *instead-of Christ* which in Latin is *anti-Christ*. Papal power condemned many to death, including John Huss, William Tyndale, Martin Luther – always claiming Christ gave exclusive authority to the Pope: *“And I*

*tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*” (Matthew 16:18–19 NIV) If Peter was infallible, why does Jesus tell him here in Matthew 16: **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”** (16:23 NIV84)? How could Peter be the first infallible pope when he denied our Lord three times and cursed himself? How could his successors withhold forgiveness from anyone who disagrees with them or had a divorce?

Divorce is not the unforgivable sin, but Jesus says blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is. (Matthew 12:32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10) Pharaoh is proof of how God can harden unrepentant hearts. We ought always to live in true fear of the Lord and listen intently to His Holy Scriptures, the Bible. But Rome’s tradition trumps Scripture, Reformed reason too, and many Lutherans listen only to their own opinions. **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** (Romans 3:18) Do our members always listen to God’s Word?

Who has the power to forgive sin? The Pope? Just pastors? All Christians? Listen to Jesus. He said to Peter, **“I will give you [future] the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”** Two chapters later in Matthew 18, Jesus says to all Christians: **“Truly I tell you [plural], whatever you [plural] bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you [plural] loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”** (18:18–20 NIV) On Easter evening with all the disciples, the Lord of the Church **“breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you [plural] forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you [plural] do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”** (John 20:22–23 NIV) Christ gave the Keys to His entire Church, all believers.

Listen to Jesus. He calls Peter by his Greek name, *Petros*, *little rock*. “You’re a *pebble*, but on this *petra*,” a *large, solid rock*, **“I will build my church.”** The feminine *petra* signals an idea which in this context is clearly Peter’s beautiful confession, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Jesus says it counts in heaven when His Church tells repentant sinners: “Your sins are forgiven.” No penance required. Unrepentance calls Christ’s Church to say, “You are not forgiven.” When Jesus **“warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ,”** Peter’s bad example shows why. No one wanted a suffering Messiah. Now Christ-crucified is risen. We’re **on Offense Giving Forgiveness**.

Years ago a young woman was emailing me questions about papal history. Fluent in Latin and Italian, she studied in the Vatican Library. I had to admit, “You’re way over my head. But it all comes down to who are you going to listen to?” Her last email said, “I see what you mean...” – then silence.

One Sunday with a text like this there she was! And I’m hearing my Lord Jesus say, **“Whoever confesses (ὁμολογήσει) me before men, I will also confess before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 10:32–33 TPA) Jesus does not want His preachers to be “respecters of persons.” Prejudice robs people of God’s truth. So I said what we were taught in the WELS according to Scripture and what I’ve discovered from my Catholic friends and neighbors whom I love dearly for their kindness and their love: “Many Catholics will tell you, ‘I don’t believe in the Pope. I trust in Jesus for my salvation.’ That’s good because Jesus says, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”** (Mark 16:16) Trusting Jesus, that’s **Christ’s Church**.

After the service I thought, “If she shakes my hand, it’s okay. If she slips out the side, Lord, I did my best.” A few minutes later, there she was coming through the line. I held out my hand, but she didn’t take it. She wrapped her arms around my neck and said, “Oh, Pastor Cordes, it’s so good to be here! I’ve been listening to your sermons on the Internet.” My heart looked up and said, “God, you’re too good!” Later our president told me she said to him, “I’m one of those Catholics Pastor Cordes was talking about. I trust in Jesus as my Savior.” That’s all we need for **Christ’s Church on Offense. Knowing Jesus, Giving Forgiveness**, we **“snatch others from the flames and save them.”** (Jude 23) **“The gates of hell will not prevail against” Christ’s Church.** The best defense is a good **Offense** in Jesus’ Name! Amen.