

*From Luther's Small Catechism: The Second Article.    Of Redemption.*

*And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*What does this mean?--Answer.*

*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be [wholly] His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.*

For me tonight begins with a little boy and a quarter. "Don't lose it," his mother says. He holds on tight - whatever happens, wherever his journey takes him he holds on tight. At his journey's end his hand opens, the quarter has not been lost.

Now follow me in this thought. The boy is no longer a boy given a quarter, but is Jesus. And you are what is precious in his hand. The Father sends him on a journey through life clinging to you. See Jesus through the time of hunger and temptation holding onto you - never letting go. Satan would distract him. But Jesus remembers his Father's word and holds you tight.

Jesus' journey leads down streets where there are great crowds. Power and glory and fame might have caused Jesus to forget the one the Father placed in his hand. But Jesus would not let go of you to grasp hold of the crowds. He journeyed on.

Holding onto you still, Jesus came to disappointment. Now no one will listen, friends are wandering away, running away - turning into betrayers. Jesus might have given up - let go of you and walked away. But disappointment would not make Jesus forget the Father's instructions.

Then came the physical pain, being whipped, being crucified, being mocked, - dying. Yet even when his pain was so great, Jesus would not let go of you. Though he himself would be crushed, in his hand you were shielded, held, kept.

Even in death: Consciousness gone, life gone, yet Jesus clings to nothing but you. The journey ends, arrived, safe, at home. Alive once more! Resurrected!

Through it all Jesus has held onto you.

Luther teaches us to confess: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, son of the Father from eternity and true man, born of the Virgin Mary is my Lord. At great cost he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death and the power of the devil, not with silver or gold but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death."

Hear the words: Jesus saved you, redeemed you, and freed you through his innocent suffering and death. Nothing that happened to him was able to force him to let go of you.

Now come with me in a new direction, a little girl with her mother. "Hold onto my hand," the mother instructs her as they are about to enter a crowded mall. "Don't let go."

The mother does not want her child to be lost. Who knows what they will encounter? As long as hand grasps hand, all will be well.

When you were baptized, Jesus took your hand. "Don't let go," he instructed you, "For all of your life's journey, don't let go."

Jesus has saved and redeemed you in his dying and rising. Jesus has freed you from sin and death and the power of the devil. Jesus did all of that as he journeyed through his life and death and resurrection.

But now as you journey through your life and your death and your resurrection, Jesus wants you to hold onto his hand. Your holding on we call faith.

Jesus knows the way. Even down the most dangerous streets. Even through neighborhoods called grief, failure, pain, loneliness, disappointment, pleasure, temptation, death. Jesus will not run away if you fall down, he will wait even if you are slow. Hold onto his hand. No matter what, hold onto his hand. Let Jesus lead.

I think about the young baseball players who died in the boat accident and their families - the violence of a boat striking a dock - the tragedy of husbands, fathers being torn from their families.

I know about Jesus' power to hold on, even through a violent collision, even through death.

I know that a young wife and young children will find healing as they walk day by day held by Jesus' hand, holding onto Jesus hand. Apart from Jesus sin and death and the power of the devil will continue to damage them, destroy them. But Jesus will bring them through.

Paul said it this way. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Not even a cross was able to cause Jesus to let go of you.

Now let nothing cause you to let go of him. Hold on tight in faith.