

“Excited!”

When I was in my mid-thirties I played in an ice hockey league in the Poconos. I was serving 3 country churches. We lived in the country. I would drive up to the ice rink at Buckhill Falls (near our conference’s camp, Pocono Plateau), and we would play our games late at night – I think it was 10 or 11 p.m. We were in the playoffs this year. It was the final game for the championship. The score was tied after regulation time, and we went to sudden death overtime. Then we got a penalty, and were short-handed. I was on the ice, and scored the winning goal.

We went wild! The packed house of hundreds of people became loud and boisterous. Actually, I’m not sure any fans were there – it was so late at night. Maybe a few family members of players. But our team went wild! We hugged each other – stinky, smelly, sweaty as we were! I mean, *we were excited!!!* Hold on to that image.

I was listening to this group singing about Jesus. They sang about Jesus, His cross, His power to make us new, to save us. And then it struck me: Those singing were doing so with very little joy or enthusiasm.

Here’s a question. In the big picture, which of these events are more important? A game-winning goal in a playoff game, in an obscure hockey league in the Pocono mountains, or the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?

How about us, this Easter Sunday morning. How excited are we about the message of Easter? Did you feel the excitement as we sang our opening hymn: “Christ the Lord is risen today! Alleluia!”

Think of the things that we can get excited about. If our kids or grandkids are going to visit. If we have tickets for a show we really want to see. If we win the door prize at a social event. If we’re finally leaving for that long-awaited vacation. Or if our favorite team is winning an important game! These can be good things, things worth getting enthused about. My game-winning overtime goal was an exciting moment for me and the team. *But here’s a Man who died, and three days later came back to life again, just as He said He would!*

It’s early – at the crack of dawn – Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, make their way to the tomb where Jesus was buried. They want to anoint the body of Jesus, but they’re concerned about how to move the huge boulder that covers the entrance to the tomb. You know the story – and maybe because we’ve heard it so many times it’s become old hat. We’ve become immune to the incredible thing that happened.

When they get to the tomb, the boulder has already been moved from the entrance. Hesitantly they inch their way inside. According to Mark, they see a young man, dressed in a white robe, and they are *terrified!* He says, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here” (Mark 16:6).

He has been raised! He is risen! Jesus’ resurrection, coupled with His life and death, mark the beginning of God’s final *healing and redemption* of the world. Jesus’ resurrection is a sign of

God's triumph over everything that would destroy us and destroy God's good creation. When we believe in this risen Lord (*believe* in the Biblical sense of trusting Christ with all our being and following Him), we become part of God's new creation, God's ultimate victory over evil and death. We are given new life in Christ.

The Bible speaks of this new life in various ways. It's being born again, putting on a new nature, already passing from death to eternal life.

When we read the New Testament, especially the Book of Acts, we get a glimpse of the transformation Jesus' resurrection made in those who followed Jesus! They're undefeatable, unconquerable! While every bit as human as we are, these first Christians lived with a sense of excitement and victory: cowards became courageous, timid followers became bold, doubters became convinced believers, death was no longer feared! The resurrection was not just something that happened to Jesus. The resurrection happened to *them*!

Listen to some of the triumphant convictions coming from these early believers:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

"And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

"The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen and guard you from evil" (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

"He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

"He is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing" (Jude 24).

Wow! There it is – radiating from the lives of these early Christians, caught up in the power of Jesus' resurrection!

How many exuberant, excited Christians do you know? Are you one? Am I one? Of course, we're human. We have good days and bad days. We fail. We doubt sometimes. We struggle with life's problems. But you can't deny that Jesus' resurrection infused these first Christian believers with a new sense of power and victory in Christ. Read the Book of Acts! The excitement throughout that account of the early church!

I think of an illustration I heard long ago – I'm not sure of the exact details, but a famous preacher was in his study one day, when his wife came in and said something that stunned this noted pastor. She said, "God is dead." He replied, "How can you say such an awful thing." She answered, "The way you've been acting so down in the dumps and all, God must be dead." Well, this shocked him into realizing that God isn't dead, of course. And that God wants us to live with joy in our believing and power through our faith.

What's written in our face, and in our demeanor? The way we respond to disappointments and difficulties when they come. Does it say, "God is dead" or "Christ is alive!" The first thing when we get up in the morning? Does it say, "God is dead", or Christ is alive"! The tone of our worship on Sunday morning. Would a stranger walking in think, "God is dead", or "Christ is alive"? Most of us believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But the question is, "Have we just *heard* about the resurrection, or has the resurrection *happened* to us?"

So, how can the resurrection happen to us? How can Jesus' resurrection infuse a new and exciting power and joy in the way we live? Are you ready for this? The answer is *death*. Oh, I know, before the *final* resurrection we'll have to physically die. But I mean a different kind of death has to take place if we're to experience the excitement of Jesus' resurrection getting hold of us.

Romans, the 6th chapter, describes what I mean. "Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, so we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:3-6). The Apostle Paul here is telling us that in order to live the new life in Christ, we must die to sin, die to our self-centered way of living. Christian baptism symbolizes this death – going under the water, then rising up to the new life in Christ, the resurrection life. Notice it says, "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Romans 6:6).

I recently watched a video of Jonathan Roumie, the actor who plays Jesus in "The Chosen", when he was a guest on a TV program. He told how he had a job in New York, but decided to move to California to further his acting career. It didn't work out. He was broke – no money to eat, he had even used up his government assistance. The only thing left, he said, was to fall on his knees, pray, and surrender himself to God. Soon after, he got the part of Jesus, and the rest is history!

In a sense, Jonathan Roumie had to die – come to an end of running his own life, and turn himself over completely to God!

We'll experience the exciting power of the resurrection only as we allow the self-centered life to be crucified, and we commit ourselves totally to Christ's control. Sam Shoemaker was an Episcopalian priest and author who had an evangelistic heart, and a knack for helping people live out their faith in practical ways. One of his books was called *Under New Management*. This is a good description of the Christian life! Under new management – under Christ's management!

For most of us, it's hard to let go and turn our life completely over to God. God may ask us to do something we're uncomfortable with. God may ask us to give up something, to go somewhere

we don't want to go. But think about it: Are we ultimately safer surrendered to God, within His will, or rather out on our own, charting our own course in life? I want to be within the will of God! "Under new management" – this can be the beginning of our living in the power of Christ's resurrection – surrendering more and more parts of our life for Him to manage!

After graduating from college and seminary, and serving churches for about 7 years, I went out of pastoral ministry for a year and worked in the trust department at Fulton Bank. I remember talking to a lady, who in the course of our conversation said something like this (not knowing I was a Christian): "I have all I want. I love my husband, and he's a wonderful man. And I try to let Christ be formed in me. He's the most important thing in my life." I thought, "Wow! Here's a lady not ashamed to talk about Jesus! I would believe also that here's a lady who wants her life to be lived under the management of Christ. A lady who wants to live in the power of Jesus' resurrection!"

There was a simple German peasant who only learned to read late in life. For him, it was a thrilling adventure each evening to pore over great writers of the past in an eager attempt to get acquainted with all of them. One day, in a great burst of enthusiasm he put a sign over his doorway: "Dante...and Shakespeare live here!" When you and I can honestly say, "Christ, the risen Lord, lives here (in me)", the horizons of our life can be expanded, and a thrilling adventure with Him can begin!

Bill Gaither wrote a song called "Get All Excited". It goes like this:

Get all excited Go tell everybody that
Jesus Christ is King
I said, Get all excited Go tell everybody that
Jesus Christ is King
Won't you get all excited Go tell everybody that
Jesus Christ is King Jesus Christ is still
The King of kings

Well, you talk about people You talk about things that really
Aren't important at all
You talk about weather You talk about problems we have
Here at home and abroad
But friend I'm excited About a solution for the world
I'm gonna shout and sing, and it's
Jesus Christ is still the King of kings

So...are you an exuberant, excited follower of Jesus? Excited about the Lord's resurrection, about resurrection to new life in Him?

I'll take scoring the winning goal in an overtime playoff game any day of the week! But, there's something to get *so much more excited about!*

