

The Rev. Amanda Eiman
3rd Sunday of Easter
April 15, 2018
Luke 24:36b-48

Story of resurrection

You may know the story of Jaycee Lee Dugard. Jaycee grew up in Anaheim and Lake Tahoe California and was a happy girl with a good life and all of the joys and struggles of a blossoming adolescent. She lived with her mother, stepfather, and younger sister. One morning at the age of 11, she was walking to school and a car driven by ex - convict Phillip Garrido and his wife Nancy pulled up beside Jaycee and they attacked, drugged, and kidnapped her. For the next eighteen years Philip and Nancy forced her to live hidden in their backyard in Concord, California.

For those eighteen years, Jaycee was abused in ways too many too count. Initially she was kept in a dark and soundproof stand alone room in that backyard, handcuffed and without access to running water, adequate sanitation, a bathroom, sunlight, medical care, or proper nutrition. Part of her abuse resulted in her giving birth to Phillips two children at 14 and 17 years of age.

Phillip and Nancy, drug addicts with various symptoms of mental illness, and not being able to have children of their own, forced Jaycee to change her name to Allissa, and to pretend that her daughters were actually her sisters and that Phillip and Nancy were their parents.

Years went on and Jaycee's memories of her previous life became distant. Phillip began displaying schizophrenic tendencies and as his paranoia and delusions increased, Jaycee became a young adult. But with the loss of his mind, so came the further loss of Jaycee's identity. The years caused her to stuff her old life way down inside her.

In her twenties, a decade after her kidnapping, Phillip and Nancy began taking their three "daughters" out in public. One would have thought Jaycee would have shouted out to someone for help or run away, but she became so resigned to her fate, so dependent on her captors, and so fearful of what would happen if she did break free, that she never did. And she found herself thinking, "Would anyone really want me, anyway?"

Reflecting back on these years, Jaycee says,

"For eighteen years I was a prisoner. I was an object for someone to use and abuse. For eighteen years I was not allowed to speak my own name."

But one fateful day, Jaycee and her girls were discovered. It was a day that Jaycee never thought she would see. The path to their discovery began a few weeks earlier when Phillip's parole officers had begun making frequent trips to his home because of reports of bizarre and erratic behaviors when he was with the girls out in public. The parole officers eventually ordered him to bring his "family" to the parole office.

That afternoon, after being separated from them and questioned for hours, Phillip confessed to kidnapping her eighteen years earlier.

And when Jaycee was asked her real name, she realized she hadn't faced who she was in so long that couldn't even say it - she had to write it. So when she wrote - JAYCEE LEE DUGARD she said that act "Was like breaking an evil spell. I wrote down my name for the

first time in 18 years. In that moment I felt free but also exhausted and completely alive at the same time."

She was on the road to becoming Jaycee again. That day was only the beginning of what was and still is a long road to recovery. But she is on it. And she is healing.

Life looks different now. She can't erase the scars of her horrific experience. But she is alive, and free, and learning and growing. And she says, "Something that was dormant in me for so long is finally getting the chance to grow and I felt it glowing inside me. A light that I thought had been extinguished is slowly coming back to life"

Not one day goes by without painful memories and scars and effects of her eighteen years of captivity but today, right now, Jaycee is living a new life. A resurrected life.

Resurrection is real in this life now

In today's gospel we hear that Jesus, in his resurrected life, and in his resurrected body, comes and stands among the disciples. He shows

the disciples his hands and his side and invites them to touch his flesh "for a ghost does not have flesh and bones like I have" he says.

He notices they are skeptical so to further show them that he is alive, he asks for a fish and eats it in their presence....as if to show them, "Hey, I'm real. So real that I'm hungry. I need to eat. And hey dead people - they don't eat fish."

So there he was, after being tortured, crucified, died and put in the tomb, he is resurrected. And standing before them.

Jesus could have waited to appear to them after their death- after they die. After all, the gift of new and eternal life in God's kingdom, the greatest gift we could ever imagine, was given to them, and to us, through Christ's death and resurrection.

But Jesus doesn't wait. He appears to them now - while they are still alive in their mortal life. Through his coming to them, he shows them that new resurrected life is possible when we die, **and** also possible here and now. No matter what horrific or painful or seemingly

hopeless situations we experience, resurrection is promised to us.

And while it is one of the most powerful gifts we are given, we don't have to wait until we are physically dead to experience it.

When darkness falls, Christ gives us light. When we fall, Christ gives us grace to stand up. When we fail to resist evil and fall in to sin, Christ helps us repent and return to his love. When we fall short of seeking and serving Christ in all persons, Christ helps us make amends. Nothing we can do or that this world can do is too final for God to resurrect. And even when we come to the end of our lives, even death is not the end for us.

Resurrected life looks different.

Now you might say well all this is well and good, but why in today's Gospel don't the disciples know it is Jesus at first, standing right with them? One might think that after spending such intimate time in the presence of this teacher and healer before his crucifixion, that they would immediately know their friend when they see him alive and well and before them again.

Instead, they are terrified and think they are perhaps seeing a ghost. And even when he begins to speak with them they are skeptical. They are joyful, and hopeful but still disbelieving and wondering in their hearts.

So, why don't they immediately know him?

Well, resurrected life looks different. Resurrected life doesn't look the same as it did before it was resurrected. So it took a moment for Jesus' friends to see the scars and hear his voice, and to realize that he was in a new body - it was a changed body, it was a healed body.

And healing changes us. Sometimes, the old is left behind and we grab onto something new. Sometimes we feel stronger. But when we are healed we are in fact changed. We are no longer broken or empty, we are made whole.

Jaycee Dugard's life is an example. Her life today is very different from what it was before or during her capture. And her life is different from what it would have been if she were never kidnapped and abused. Is she the person she would have become if she hadn't gone

through that ordeal? Only God knows, But wondering what life would have been like, or wondering who the pre-kidnapped Jaycee might have become as an adult is useless. That person doesn't exist.

The new, resurrected Jaycee exists now. And that person is healing and growing in ways she could not have anticipated.

Jaycee has been gifted with the gift of resurrection, and you and I have too. It is perhaps the greatest gift we will ever receive.

So where in your life are you experiencing resurrection? Where in your life have you grabbed hold of it?

Of course it isn't always easy to see, even though it is being offered to us daily. We may be fearful of what changes will be needed to live in that new way, or maybe you and I are just fine the way things are in life. Or maybe there are things in the way, things that need to die or change or heal in order for us to even see the path of resurrection that is being opened to us. And we may not always be able to see ahead of time how the end of one moment, or period, or experience

leads to the beginning of another, but Christ brings a new beginning to every one of our endings, our pains, our struggles and despair.

So ask God, especially this season of Easter, the season of resurrection, to give you the grace to you see and know and experience the resurrection in your life. Ask God to give you the grace to let go of what might be keeping you from it, the courage to grab hold of it, and the grace to relinquish any fear about what changes it might bring.

New life is how you and I know Christ most fully and how we make Christ known to the world. So grab hold and let resurrected life change you, and let God use the resurrection in your life to help change others.

If you do, your life and theirs will never be the same. Amen.