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SYDENHAM
METHODIST CHURCH
NEWSLETTER
2020

Church Address:

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Church Website:

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Prayer Network

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Letter from the Manse

Friends,

Would you ever have believed we would experience anything like this? This still seems like some bad dream, from which we are going to awake sometime soon! But the reality is that Covid-19 has changed the world and human life in ways that we couldn't have previously imagined. At the very least, it has caused disruption and inconvenience. At its worst, it has caused death and devastation.

So, I write this letter to you under the dark cloud of Coronavirus. However, I know that for us who profess faith in Christ, we hold on to the fact that God is Lord of all, and by His Spirit is in the process of making all things new. I believe that God is at work in ways that perhaps we can't see or appreciate. There is a rainbow of hope that we have in the sky above these dark clouds, in that Jesus is Lord of all and over all – and Coronavirus can't change that!

Since March, like many others, I have learned new skills, not least in the area of technology. I'd never heard of 'Zoom' before! And we've done our best in having worship services online for our church family to engage with. None of this is ideal, but we're trying to make the best of a bad situation. We've installed a camera in the church so that worship services can be recorded and put on our church website for people to view. Please keep on checking www.sydenhammethodist.org for these worship services and any other news. The church emails allow me to keep the congregation informed with what is happening. If you're not on the emailing list, please let me know and I'll gladly add you to the list.

But it's not just new skills that I've learned, but new words too! At our Pastoral Efficiency session of Conference held online we reflected on the word '*liminal*'. I had heard of it previously but didn't really know what it meant. Susan Beaumont has written on this and describes '*liminal*' as that time or space when the old way of doing things doesn't work but a way forward isn't yet clear. It is being in that threshold of the old being behind,

but you can't see clearly into the future. And of course, we are currently in such a season within the life of the church. We can't operate in the traditional way, perhaps having left it behind for good, and we're unsure yet as to what it will all look like in the future.

Whilst reflecting on this, as ministers we were reminded that this was also true for God's people in the past. When the Israelites left Egypt, they left behind the old ways of living and didn't know what the new way of living would look like. Yet through it all, God was with them. And we know this to be true for us in this liminal season. In the midst of our anxiety and frustration, we know God's presence with us - guiding us, supporting us, shaping us.

In appreciating that we can't know how things might be in the future, it is helpful for us to set out clearly those values that shape and define who we are as God's people in Sydenham. As a Church Council, we discussed those values that make us who we are and the type of

community we aspire to be. I then worded the following for our church website...

'In valuing unity and fellowship, we rejoice in the uniqueness of every individual, and seek to ensure that everyone feels welcome and included as an integral part of our church family. We encourage every follower of Christ to engage in service appropriate to the gifts that God has given. We seek to care for and support each other, and those within our local community and around the world. At all times, we seek to be generous in giving and receiving grace, encouraging each other's faith through discipleship.'

In these times of not being able to gather in the ways that we're used to and want, it is vital that we remember that we are part of God's family together. This means that we are connected to each other, in the love and fellowship of the Spirit.

As we think about our church family, there has been a change in our staff. We were sad to see Emma-Jayne

Speers move to another appointment in March but wish her God's blessings for the future and thank her for her service with us. And we welcome Aaron Sweeney as a student youth & children's worker on placement with us for the next 3 years.

It has been a tough time for so many people, but God is showing his grace and mercy through acts of love and compassion of His people, and through the knowledge and skill of those in the medical profession. Let me say again, a huge thank you to those who have served, and continue to serve throughout this Covid-19 pandemic - from leading worship online to leading our children's ministry online and creche online to collecting groceries and prescriptions for those in the church family and in our local community. So many people have played their part, and I am grateful to God for you.

I close with this final thought. However you are feeling through all this, know that God's presence is with you. And as we move towards Christmas, we offer our worship to Jesus who came and made His dwelling among

us, 'Emmanuel – God with us.' And remember, regardless of our current circumstances, Jesus is Lord, and through and in Him we see that rainbow of hope. May each of you, and those whom you love, know the peace and grace of God this Christmas and beyond.

Christmas Blessings,

Robin



Youth and Children's Ministry

Hello! I'm Aaron and I'm the new student youth worker in Sydenham! For some of you it's a hello again as Sydenham was my home church about a decade ago before my dad became a minister but it's safe to say, I've grown up a bit since then. In September I began my degree in Applied Theology (Youth and Community Work) through the new Moorlands College regional centre in Youth Link NI and also began my placement in Sydenham. I'll be with you for the next 3 years, primarily working with the young people in the church, but also doing a bit of children's work too.

Obviously this year has been a bit of a strange one, and it has made life a lot more difficult in many ways but especially when it comes to youth ministry. That doesn't mean we stop doing it. We all have had to adapt to living life a bit more online, and that's no different for youth work.

My hope and prayer would be that we get back to doing youth ministry in person as soon as we can, but whilst that is not possible, we'll continue online using social media and zoom!

I want to take the opportunity to ask you to pray for our young people. Life is strange and their online space has been invaded. Please pray as they overcome so many new challenges that they would continue to engage with and feel connected to God.

I'm really excited to get to know some new faces and catch-up with old faces over the next few years!

Aaron Sweeney



Advent & Christmas Worship Services

You will appreciate that our worship during in Advent and Christmas will need to be different this year. Below is the timetable for during December but of course everything is subject to change. Making use of a Wednesday evening allows the 72-hour gap between services so that we don't have to do a full 'Covid' clean, which we would need to do if we held a Sunday evening service.

With restrictions on how many people we can have in the church building at any one time, we plan to hold 2 services of carols by candlelight (which will be the same). Please book your seat in advance for either of these services, by contacting Ruth Boyce on 90481152 or emailing her at ruthboyce@talktalk.net Likewise with our Christmas morning service. Please note that we plan for all our services to be recorded and placed on our church website for you to view at your leisure.

The Christmas Grateful Table for families and our annual Christingle service will both be held online. The Grateful Table will be 'live' whilst the Christingle will be pre-recorded.

There will not be Morning Worship on Sunday 27th December in the church. Instead we will have a pre-recorded service available online. This is because it wouldn't be fair to ask people to clean the church to get it 'Covid' ready on Boxing Day.

The Worship Services can be viewed on our church Facebook page and through our website www.sydenhammethodist.org

Wednesday 2 December

7.30pm Advent Communion

Sunday 6 December

9.30am Christmas Grateful Table (live online)

11.00am Morning Worship (BCM Christmas Toy appeal)

Wednesday 9 December

7.30pm 'Blue Christmas' (for those experiencing grief)

Sunday 13 December

11.00am Morning Worship

6.30pm Pre-recorded Christingle service available online

Wednesday 16 December

7.30pm Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 20 December

11.00am All-Age Carol Service

7.00pm Carols by Candlelight

Friday 25 December

9.30am Christmas Morning Celebrations

(No Service on Sunday 27 December but pre-recorded online)

Assurance in Jesus

We are all acutely aware how we are going through challenging days and we often read about the mental health impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

The Methodist Churches in East Belfast have just done an online 6 week Bible Study on the theme of 'Lifting the lid on Mental Illness' that focused on our faith and mental health. It looked at well-known Bible stories to understand how God treats those who feel exhausted, rejected, isolated, hopeless and heartbroken.

We believe the word of God offers us hope. God cares for us, especially in difficult times. If you missed it can be viewed on the East Belfast Methodists Youtube channel.

I carry the following comforting words in my Bible written by Roy Lessin who founded DaySpring Cards and has written many inspirational devotional quotes and booklets. It is based on Philippians 4:13. *I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.*

**May Jesus assure you that as you follow Him
You will never meet a fear He cannot conquer,
You will never face an enemy He cannot defeat,
You will never enter a battle He cannot win,
You will never have a need He cannot meet,
You will never face a temptation He cannot overcome,
You will never have a burden He cannot lift,
You will never face a problem He cannot solve,
You will never have a bondage He cannot break,
You will never have a moment when He does not care,
You will never have a time when He is not there.**

Every man or woman of God must go through a shaping process. We are *like clay in the hand of a potter* - Jeremiah 18:6. God can use people and difficult trials to fashion us into his instruments. He is in fact perfecting us and strengthening us. God can use the hardest of times to test, chisel and hone his servants. Throughout the Bible many well-known characters went through hard times.

Moses was shaped in a desert, Esther was held captive in a palace, David was trained in a lonely pasture and Paul spent years in prison. They went through challenging and difficult times, but they all were there for a purpose, as part of God's bigger plan for their lives.

We will look back on 2020 as the year when changed many things changed in our world, may God continue to give us peace, courage and faith as we approach 2021.

Ruth Boyce, Circuit Steward



Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed your hand has provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me

A Time to Share – A Personal View from **Rachel Waugh**

What is it like surviving with a mental health illness? I use the word 'surviving' rather than 'living' because that's often what it feels like, simply trying to keep your head above the waves. Of course everyone's situations in life are unique so I can only speak from my own experience with mental health illnesses over the last 5 years, but I hope it can bring awareness to this subject and give hope to those deep in the battle.

I started struggling with anxiety in my first year of secondary school and I didn't know what was happening. We were not taught about mental health in primary school so I thought I was going insane and completely lost my faith in God. Why would a supposedly 'good God' make me go through this? I was certain He had left me so I concluded that there must not be a God and therefore didn't believe He existed which, let me tell you, is pretty difficult when your dad is a minister and your house has crosses and Bible verses stuck up everywhere! I only decided to look back at Christianity again when I started getting better after going to therapy for about a year and a half. I began to pick up my life again and one of the parts of it that had completely collapsed was the spiritual aspect. I finally commenced building my relationship back up with God and learned that He had never actually left and it was me who had got up and walked away.

A couple of years go by of building my faith and I got to a place where I accepted Jesus as my saviour one night in my room. That was last year. Little did I know how important that moment would be for me for the next season of my life. In September 2019, I started getting panic attacks that would come at a moment's notice, anywhere and anytime which, as you can imagine, they disrupted my life entirely. Just like 3 years prior, I stopped being able to get into school, I stopped going to church, I stopped going out with my friends and my entire life fell apart. I was in

a constant state of survival mode and running on little sleep due to insomnia. After a couple months of this, I started to fall into depression which took me right down to the lowest point I have ever been in my life. One aspect of my life that stayed strong though this time was my faith in God. As a consequence of insomnia, I would be up almost right through the whole night and so I would use this time to lift my hands and silently praise Him through worship music which is where I feel His presence the most. I genuinely believe that if it wasn't for him, I would not be writing this article that you are reading right now.

At the time of writing this, I have been taking medication and going to therapy for almost a year and it has truly helped me to get where I am today. I know for a fact that my story is not the only one like it. The number of young people facing mental health issues in the UK and Ireland has been steadily increasing over the last few years. According to mentalhealth.org.uk, 1 in 8 young people in the UK alone struggle with a mental health illness which, put into context, is about 3 or 4 young people per average school class. I think it's so important, as Christians, that we reach out to those struggling with mental health illnesses and let them know that they don't have to go through it alone and aren't 'weak' or 'shameful' for seeking medical help. Simple texts from family (and even those who hardly knew me) saying they were praying for me and my parent's patience and reassurance both helped me immensely. It costs nothing to be kind or to check in with someone but could easily save someone's life. If you yourself are having a hard time, know that you are worth fighting for and loved by those around you, but most importantly God who loves unconditionally. He put you here for a reason and it may not be totally obvious just yet but His timing is always perfect. Keep on letting that beautiful light that God put in you, shine!

Thank you, Rachel, for sharing your experience. I'm sure you will be supported in prayer by our congregation

My Favourite Christmas Carols

I love Christmas Carols. They tell the birth of Jesus. The feeling of joy and great expectations are within each one. But there are two in particular which are very nostalgic to me and each for very different reasons.

The first, Still the night, holy the night: Sleeps the world; hid from sight, Mary and Joseph in stable bare, Watch o'er the child beloved and fair, Sleeping in heavenly rest, Sleeping in heavenly rest. The second verse is portraying the shepherds. In this verse I can visualize the night starting out like any other night but it was no ordinary night for them. The angels announced the birth of Jesus to these lowly shepherds.

Wow! The third verse announced the birth of Jesus to us all. It was written by a German, Joseph Mohr and the nostalgic part is that one particular evening during the First World War when the German army and the British army faced each other, hostilities ceased. It was Christmas and a German soldier started singing this carol. Before long both sides were singing, one in English and the other side in German.

Amazing! I'm sure the Angels above were joining in!

The second carol, Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head. This is traditionally a carol for younger children. The nostalgia here is the fact that this was the first carol/hymn I learnt off by heart when I was a young child and though I did not, nor do I now, have a good singing voice, I remember I loved to sing this carol and even sing it as a solo. Children are so innocent!

Sally McKinstry

Girls' Brigade

Hello everyone, hope you are all continuing to stay safe and well. This year has definitely not been what we were expecting when it came to a new GB session. We were hoping to start our session in November and the officers and leaders had met via zoom to get organised and to think of how we could safely welcome our girls back. However, GBHQ have now changed this to January. We have created a new social media page to keep our parents up to date as well as to post competitions for our girls to complete and have a little fun.



News within the company includes having three new officers complete their training. These are Nadia Hall, Brooke Hanna and Claire Flannigan and we also had three officers complete their autism training. Finally, we would like to congratulate our Explorer section leader, Melissa and her husband, on welcoming their new baby boy, Judah, in July. The officers would like to thank you for your continued support and we ask that you please keep the girls and the company in your thoughts and prayers.

The Sydenham GB Officers



Finance and Property.

First of all I would like to say a sincere THANK YOU to all who have upheld our church in prayer this year, and also to those who have been able to support us financially and in helping and supporting our property developments.

Probably the main item of note is the refurbished vestibule. I hope many of you have had an opportunity to have a look at it. If you haven't yet seen it – I would invite you to come along and have a look. I think the most striking aspects are its brightness and spaciousness. The provision of new plate glass windows, the replacement of the partition wall to the Taylor Room by glass framed folding doors, new glass entrance doors into the church, improved lighting and new floor covering have all combined to provide us with a very attractive Welcome Area which has inbuilt flexibility for use in a variety of ways. Thanks are due to the contractor, Mark McElhinney and his team from ABLE Projects who have completed the works to a very quality finish. There are also two large screen displays which can provide “a visual” of what is happening in the church service, or can be used in other ways for, say, meetings etc. All this couldn't have happened without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and your help in supporting the work. So, another THANK YOU to all who supported our Gift Day on 14 March (donations £28250.00, gift aid £4435.00, and interest free loans £4000.00), and also THANK YOU to all who helped clean the church after the work was finished, and to all who helped get our church “COVID – clean” for our return to worship in the church on Sunday 27 September. There is also a special THANK YOU to all who have continued to support the church financially through your Free Will Envelope donations week by week through what has been, and continues to be, a difficult time for cash-flow until we get back to some form of “normality” after this pandemic. I have included some views of our refurbished Welcome Area.



For many years until he sadly passed away last September, Desmond Ferguson was an ever present and familiar person in our vestibule, welcoming us and opening the door into the church as we met for worship. As a special tribute to Desmond, the former wooden framed doors into the church have been used to construct a cross which is now mounted at the front of the church (see photograph) and also kneeling stools to be used at the communion table.



The cross made from the original wooden doors into the church

Hymn 746 in our Hymn Book is “One more step along the world I go.” The chorus is “And it’s from the old I travel to the new; Keep me travelling along with you.” I think those words are very appropriate for our situation today as we seek to travel through the Coronavirus pandemic and emerge into what our “new” lifestyles may look like. We can apply this too many aspects of our spiritual journey, and indeed even apply it to our premises as we seek to renew and refurbish them to meet the challenges of our mission that lie ahead. The important thing, of course is found in the last line of the chorus that we keep travelling with Christ no matter what our everyday circumstances may be. In my view, the people of Sydenham Methodist have been a shining example of the ‘body of Christ’ in action through pandemic ministry, pastoral compassion and help, witness for the Kingdom, generosity in giving to the work of the church, and encouragement for what we have been able to put in place such as the video technology, and, of course, our vestibule refurbishment. It has been a tremendous team effort, guided and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Brian Maxwell, Society Steward.

We are grateful to God for those who have served so faithfully within the life of the church and who now experience life in all its fulness.



Ann Joseph	24 June 2019
Bill McCappin	27 July 2019
Desmond Ferguson	10 September 2019
Norma Murdock	26 September 2019
Nancy McMurtry	8 October 2019
Masie Gordon	29 October 2019
Betty Doran	4 November 2019
Jean Montgomery	14 November 2019
Bob Prichard	14 November 2019
Freddie Snowball	21 December 2019
John Moore	27 January 2020
Billy Barnes	6 April 2020
Esther Burns	22 May 2020
Trevor Neill	18 September 2020
Frances Chambers	14 November 2020

Retirement and Covid 19

Last September I retired after 51 years in catering, the build up to which was really excitement and dreams that I would like to happen. We all I think want to retire to things we want to do, places we want to go to and people we would like to meet up with again. Reality is not always like that, grandchildren come into vogue much more because your own children realise that this is childcare on tap. I love my grandchildren dearly and they are four lovely children, but now I am bringing them to school four days a week, picking up two days + a week, time is my controller, not the other way round. (would not change it for the world) I am still up at or before six waiting for the off with school, my wife and I try to get out and about in between times and enjoy our time together. Days just seem to roll into each other so quickly now. Maybe it is because I am now getting older!

Sadly, Desmond, our door person in church passed away last year and I was asked and chose to take on the mantel of his job within church. I really enjoy meeting people, chatting to them, getting hugs and just doing my bit of pastoral care before church. Then somewhere in China people started to die, and the world was thrown into panic.

Everything was about to change drastically in ways which we could not perceive. Suddenly we had to stay in and could not see our families and only one hour outside etc.

Not seeing my children and grandchildren was the most wrenching thing of all, we would talk on the phone but that made things worse; the longing for them only deepened. Then I had my birthday in March with just Valerie & myself. I got an Amazon Echo Show which meant I could now see my children and have a proper conversation with them. Better than not seeing them certainly.

I also missed my church, the closeness of God, the people and the role I played in it, when we went out for walks, we tried to see church

members and just chat, more like shout at them at a distance, but it was nice. We knocked on Georgie's door once, went into the street and when she opened the door bellowed happy birthday in song to her, (Her sisters' fault). Robin started the recorded services which helped to some degree, but it was so impersonal, no one's fault, and it is certainly nice to have Jesus back in our lives via our minister. It is just the way it is. I did find that with not seeing the children I could spend more time at my bible readings and not rush them in the mornings but be able to absorb them and try and dig into the meanings. Time is moving on and we are allowed out more but unfortunately, I damaged my knee during June, so our nine-mile walks, or into Hollywood and back are now reduced to a lap of the park. (Update: finally went to doctors in September and am now on antibiotics) Mind you, because of lock down there is a different type of beauty in the trees and flowers, in the sounds and smells that we took for granted before.

We are trying to get back to normal now with the lifting of many restrictions, and as a church we are working hard to get open again. Meetings and more meetings, cleaning, emptying the church of everything but the walls and pews is going to make for such a different kind of church, but church and our faith in Jesus Christ will see us through this. If everything were easy it would not be worthwhile. Certainly, it will be to some not like church at all, as even in church there will be so many restrictions and people may be scared to come out, but I will do my bit to try and liven the proceedings as they enter once again into God's house. With the Lord's blessing the world will get back to normal as quickly as it can but until then trust in Jesus to see us through. So I am now back on the school run, snatching hours here and there with my wife, which actually makes our time precious but we can only leave our prayers for this situation to end in God's hands and be there ready to pick up the next mantel when asked to do so. God bless you all and stay safe.

John Gray

Life During Covid 19 Lockdowns

With the mantra of saving the NHS, stay in and stay safe ringing in my ears, I've had a journey of discovery. During lockdown I've been amazed how we uncovered new local streets that our family had never walked before as part of our daily exercise, unearthed baking recipes for plain flour when S/R couldn't be found and located the paint brush (from the back of the cupboard) to tackle those decorating jobs long overdue.

A pleasurable aspect of lockdown was having a chat on the doorstep with a few members of the congregation who live alone and providing a book or jigsaw when their supplies had run out.

During August we took a chance to take a camping holiday and unearthed a beautiful part of N.Ireland rarely visited by us, Fermanagh.

It was a blessing to have the whole family together during uncertain times in the summer.

Now school is back, methods have been devised to keep a class bubble from mixing with other classes, washing hands multiple times a day and as a classroom assistant coping with a face mask for most of a day. Initially I felt apprehensive about school, but quickly a routine

developed that lowered anxiety and it was lovely to see how the children appeared happy to be back amongst friends. A surprising revelation was that I could still learn new tricks; Zoom and Collaborate being two new ways of connecting with others. It has been fun connecting again with our Squirrel group fortnightly on Zoom.

Street Pastoring has also found ways of adapting. We go into the city centre earlier to chat with revellers or meet youths in the parks.

Covid 19 lockdown has fuelled frustrations and mental health issues. Lately, I prayed with a mental health nurse who was worried about a patient suffering with anorexia due to the Coronavirus and on another occasion, we helped to break up a fight between teenagers. Our aim remains: to care, listen, help and show God's love. For me, the best discovery was time to be still in God's presence, reading the Bible, praying and enjoying the peace and wonder of God's creation on a sunny day in my back garden.

Valerie Fullerton

Coping with Lockdown

Lockdown has been a strange time. I am not currently working so was fortunate in many ways that I was not as badly affected as some. The biggest impact I felt was the lack of interpersonal interaction. Like a lot of people, I have been introduced to the new concept of Zoom, but neither that or the phone fully replaced the experience of person to person contact.

Although my son Andy was working from home, he was based in Coleraine, so he was missed. It was great when the restrictions were relaxed when we were finally able to meet up outside. The fantastic weather we were blessed with over this period really helped.

Eleanor and Laura both continued to work, but Eleanor was redeployed for a while, which was challenging for her.

The pace of life certainly slowed down during lockdown, which enabled us to spend more time together as a family. We experimented with cooking new dishes, played games, talked more and watched less TV. The dog was never walked as much, but mostly round the streets as we were limited where he could go due to the restrictions. He really missed his trips to the forests and beaches.

On the positive side there was very little traffic about, so you could tune into nature and your surroundings more fully.

I did some shopping for friends who were self-isolating, and the queues for the shops was a novel experience, but at least it rarely had to be done in the rain.

Just before lockdown, I had renewed contact with an old childhood friend who had just moved back to Northern Ireland from abroad.

During lockdown we started having Zoom calls, and now with a few other friends we have virtual reunions on a regular basis. It has been good to catch up with what has been happening in each other's lives since. Without the lockdown we may all not have made time for this. Although at times challenging, lockdown did have some positives. Being limited where we could go, I had more time to do all the wee jobs around the house I had never got round to, and the garden never looked so good.

I was able to reconnect with some old friends and made more effort to keep in touch with other family and friends. The sense of community was very noticeable, with people looking out for each other more than before. Hopefully, this will continue into the future.

Alan Gray





Author: Hey God. Hey John. // John Roedel

Me: Hey God.

God: Hello.

Me: I'm falling apart. Can you put me back together?

God: I would rather not.

Me: Why

God: Because you aren't a puzzle.

Me: What about all of the pieces of my life that are falling down onto the ground?

God: Let them stay there for a while. They fell off for a reason. Take some time and decide if you need any of those pieces back.

Me: You don't understand! I'm breaking down!

God: No - you don't understand. You are breaking through. What you are feeling are just growing pains. You are shedding the things and the people in your life that are holding you back. You aren't falling apart. You are falling into place. Relax. Take some deep breaths and allow those things you don't need anymore to fall off of you. Quit holding onto the pieces that don't fit you anymore. Let them fall off. Let them go.

Me: Once I start doing that, what will be left of me?

God: Only the very best pieces of you.

Me: I'm scared of changing.

God: I keep telling you - YOU AREN'T CHANGING!! YOU ARE BECOMING!

Me: Becoming who?

God: Becoming who I created you to be! A person of light and love and charity and hope and courage and joy and mercy and grace and compassion. I made you for more than the shallow pieces you have decided to adorn yourself with that you cling to with such greed and fear. Let those things fall off of you. I love you! Don't change! ... Become! Become! Become who I made you to be. I'm going to keep telling you this until you remember it.

Me: There goes another piece.

God: Yep. Let it be.

Me: So ... I'm not broken?

God: Of course not! - but you are breaking like the dawn. It's a new day. Become!!!

MERRY
Christmas



