

New Year's Eve Communion Service: December 31, 2006

**NO TAG DAY!**  
**Ephesians 4:29-32; Psalm 103:8-12**

1. Anyone ever seen the *Antiques Roadshow*? What always fascinates me are the people who happen to find something incredibly valuable in someone else's garbage. Or buy something at a garage sale for 5 bucks that's worth thousands of dollars. At the Toronto version of the show, a woman brought in a figurine she'd bought for about \$15, if I'm not mistaken—and it was worth over \$150,000!
  - a. Of course, the problem is that some people see this, and they start going out buying junk and sifting through people's garbage—or **save** stuff that should be thrown away thinking it will be valuable someday. And what they end up with is a house jammed with **junk!** My parents have a friend named Sonny who trolls the streets on garbage day—and picks up all this...**junk!** His garage and basement are **jammed** with this stuff!
  - b. The other side, of course, is people tossing stuff they should keep. Lori and I know that from personal experience. Look at these chairs, for example. Old oak chairs. This is an old oak desk chair. These are old theatre seats. All they needed were a few inexpensive repairs. Why do people throw stuff like this out? Usually, because it's cluttering things up. They bump into in the middle of the night, or they move it for the 26<sup>th</sup> time, or someone tells them it will cost \$37,000 to fix it.
  - b. This is my point. Sometimes we **trash** what we should **keep**; and sometimes we **keep** what we should **trash**.
    - The answer to people who trash what they should keep is...**Lori**. My wife can see hope and possibilities for things where no one else can. She's amazing. And she inspires me to join her in her vision for old stuff. Actually, I don't have a **choice**...
    - The answer to people who **keep** what they should **trash** is...**Garbage Amnesty Day! No Tag Day**. See, on other days, you need a green tag like this if you want to put out extra bags of garbage. You can pile as much garbage in your driveway as it will hold, **provided** it's not tires, appliances or toxic.
2. It's possible, you know, to do with our souls and our hearts, what we do with our stuff. To trash what we should treasure and keep; and to treasure—cling to—what we really should trash. Today's service is strategically placed on the cusp of a brand new year. After midnight tonight we will look at 2006 in the rear view mirror. And I'd like for us to just do some searching around in the closets, the basement, the attic, the garage—and then **keep** some things, and hopefully **get rid** of some things.
  - a. Anyone here ever gotten rid of something you wish you'd kept? I've told you how my Dad once chopped up the top to an antique, solid black walnut pump organ to get a fire started.
    - Another family blooper. We used to live in this huge old cockroach infested house in Erie, PA. My parents were so anxious to get out of there that when we moved, they left what they described as an old, heavy lamp with cut glass all over it in the attic. They **left** it there! I have this image of a future Antique's Roadshow where someone holds up this Tiffany Lamp worth 100,000 bucks and says, "Some bimbo left this in the attic of a house we bought!"

- As I thought about this—I wondered, “What is it that we trash that we ought to keep?” I have a few things on my list—see if maybe you agree.
- b.. For example, I think we honestly, sometimes, trash our own reputations. Our credibility. By the way, a good reputation is extremely valuable. Listen to this:

**A sterling reputation is better than striking it rich; a gracious spirit is better than money in the bank (Prov. 22:1 Msg.)**

- Reputations are funny things. A good reputation hard to earn and easy to lose. A stupid, careless act; a nasty word; one or two irresponsible acts will do it.
- The point is **not** to pretend you’re someone you’re not to gain respect. The point is to actually **be** the person you want to be known as and, especially, to **not get careless**. To **think** before you say words you’ll regret, before you give someone a piece of your mind—or send your flaming email; before you click on something sleazy on your computer, before you have an extra glass of wine. See, the dumb thing we convince ourselves of is, “No one will ever know!” Or “**Everyone** does this.” Or, “It’s not **that** big of a deal!”
- Be careful! Reputations are **so** valuable! You’re gonna want to hang onto yours for a long time!
- c. Something else that’s valuable. Tough experiences. Hard, heart-breaking times. Tough lessons. Anyone here have some scars on you—learned some really, **really** tough, expensive lessons? Anyone had their heart broken?
- Our instincts make us want to ditch that stuff and run. Get rid of them. Forget about them. My sense is that we’ve paid way too **much** for the experience to not learn from it! And God doesn’t see it as garbage. I James says this:

**-Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way (James 1:2-4 Msg).**

- George Santayana put it like this: “Those who don’t learn from history are condemned to repeat it.”
- d. Something else people throw away quite quickly. Regularly gathering like this with others to learn and worship. First, let me be clear on something; I think it’s really dangerous and wrong to attend church out of sheer obligation. Doing that is like getting vaccinated against truth—little doses that come in painful jabs, so that you eventually become immune.
- But I **also** think it’s wrong and dangerous to put gatherings like this on the, “Well, we’ll go...if there are no hockey games, no family things, or if we haven’t been up late the night before...” In other words, if we can’t find anything better to do, if it’s cost-free, convenient—well, then we’ll go. Now, I can read your minds. You’re thinking, “Come on, Ken! Of course you want us to come. **You’re one of the ones putting on the show! This is your livelihood!**

-And that’s a fair shot. So, let me tell you what the Bible says. It says,

**And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near (Hebrews 10:25 NLT).**

-See, we end up with an avalanche of information going through our brains and our hearts every single day. It is **so** easy in a world like ours to get off track; to lose our values and lose our way. To get discouraged. We need to be encouraged—and we need to encourage others. I want you to know why I'm here. It's not just a job. I believe the church is the hope of the world. To be the **hope...**to be **Jesus** in my world, I need **you!**

-Believe me, I'm not into the perfect attendance merit badge thing. Not at all! I just think gathering with others like this in Jesus' name is one of the few positive influences left in our world!

- e. The fourth thing I think we need to be really careful to treasure **quiet**. Space in our lives to not **do**, just **be**. Television-free, noise free, duty-free, cell-phone free, email and text message free space where no one can demand that we answer, pick-up, click or do.
- This is kind of an individual thing—and I'm not going to give you five easy ways to do this, but I am telling you, we were not made to live in constant noise and constantly available upon demand. Recently I was somewhere using the restroom, and I heard a cell-phone ring inside one of the stalls—and then a prolonged conversation. I think, "This is **absurd! IS NOTHING SACRED?!**"
- Even Jesus occasionally said to his disciples, "Let's get outta here and find some quiet!" He got up early in the morning, sometimes before daybreak, and hiked a mountain by himself to just be with the Father. If He, Son of God, needed that—I would imagine we do too. So...don't be too quick to set it out by the curb to be picked up by anyone who comes along!
- f. One more—and this ties in with what's coming next. Sometimes we're way too quick to just give up on a friendship or a relationship. Someone says something we find offensive, does something we don't understand—even acts in a way where we sense that they're cool and disinterested, doesn't take our advice, doesn't do what **we** think they should, and we just start pulling away. We don't talk, we don't ask what's happening—sometimes we don't even give them the benefit of the doubt.
- I'm not saying this because I'm such an excellent friend or because I'm a relational expert, but because I've **let** it happen; I've **done** it. And I've come to the realization, "You know, it's not that I have such an extensive list of really good friends that I can afford to let a few drift off." All relationships need attention because if you let them drift, they will **always** go in the wrong direction.
- There are **very** few instances where marriages, parent-child relationships and friendships are irreparable. Way fewer than most people think. It's my guess that most relational breakdowns are not caused by colossal, obnoxious offenses, but by misunderstandings, near misses. Michael W. Smith wrote a song called **Friends** that's quite outdated now. In it he had a line that's always stuck with me; **A lifetime's not too long to live as friends**. It's clear from everything the Bible teaches that our relationships with others are extremely important to God. Jesus said, and I'm paraphrasing, "If you're in the middle of a worship service, and you realize that you've got a broken relationship—**don't even wait for the service to end! Go fix it!**"

3. Now, this next part is the juicy one—the one we’re going to take action on in this service as we take communion. It’s the garbage we save—stuff in our hearts that stinks up every room we’re in. It’s stuff that keeps us from moving on in life. And it needs to go.
- a. Sometimes it’s obstacles; things that just keep tripping us up. Hebrews 12:1 says

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1 TNIV).**

- 1) Sometimes obstacles are character flaws that are just under the surface of our lives. I’ve found at least two in myself. One of them is impatience. I finally figured it out after getting stopped for speeding several times. It doesn’t mean I’ve **stopped** speeding. I just speed with care, now. Actually, I am really, **really** working on it. And it shows itself in other areas—don’t get excited, cause I’m not going to tell you about them!

-For me, another obstacle has been wanting to be liked and wanting to keep the peace. Being liked is not a bad thing—but it can be if you can’t say the things you really need to say.

-Fear, obsessive behavior about neatness and germs, being careless with money, being late, forgetting about appointments, worry, slicking up the truth, being judgmental, critical and condescending—all these things can be obstacles.

- 3) And obstacles are not necessarily things that are evil or wicked or wrong. We just keep **tripping** over them! In a race, an obstacle would be an overcoat, or high heels, or a straitjacket, or flippers, or hip-waders. You can hobble along, sweat, and trip—but you won’t win, and you may not finish.
- In fact, sometimes obstacles are potentially good things. Neatness is good—until you start picking lint off of **other** people’s clothes. Money is a good thing, but if you get obsessed with making it, spending it and keeping it—it will trip you up. Having a good work ethic is great—but when your life pretty much becomes all about your work—it will become a ball and chain.

- 4) I want you to imagine getting out of bed every morning, you’re half asleep—headed for the shower. **Bam!** You slam your foot into the leg of the dresser, or a pair of steel-toed work boots, or the surf-board under your bed. You hop around, shed a few tears, do a little unauthorized cursing, **Dadgum it!** If you kept his up for 2 years and finally had to have two of your small toes amputated—what would you be? Anyone want to answer? **An IDIOT!**

-Yet we do this all the time in some areas. Same stupid stuff—keep tripping over it, going back—tripping over it, going back—and we **never move the obstacle!**

-Is there an obstacle in your life that you keep tripping over? It keeps you from running well. It frustrates you and hurts others—and yet you keep doing it? Would you, this morning, be willing to lay it at the foot of the cross

and say, Jesus, “I’m **tired** of tripping! I’m tired of running into the same old barriers again and again. Would you **please** help me! I’ll do whatever it takes!” I think, if you’ll own it, He will.”

- b. There’s something else that you may want—and **need** to leave behind in 2006—put out for the trash. It’s a detour you’re on. It could be some trail you’ve been on for some time. And, truth is, you **know** you’re not on the right road.

-It’s easy to stray, isn’t it? Most of us never intend to—we just get frustrated; bored. The other side of the fence calls to us; at first we ignore it. Then we think, “Well, it wouldn’t hurt to just *listen*. Just once.” And, of course, that’s the hook. We get a little charge from it. We think, “Wow, my life **has** gotten boring.” Every detour starts just a fraction of an inch from the main road, but it’s not long until you’re **way** down a road you don’t want to be on.

-I’ll tell you how it happens. We lie to ourselves about the detour. We play games with our mind. Rationalize. And, of course, the thing we never think about is the cliff at the end of it. A couple of months ago, Ted Haggard, pastor of a church of 12,000 people in Colorado Springs, Colorado, was publicly humiliated before the world with the exposure of a side to him no one knew about. I just feel really, really sad for him and for his wife Gayle.

-Friends, truth is **everyone** is capable of a fall like that. And you need to know, if you’re on a detour, it **will** come. It will. The only other way out of this kind of stuff is to get out, call on God, and get help before the whole thing rips open.

-Detours are not fun, interesting little diversions. Satan puts them on everyone’s path for a reason. And they’re not necessarily sexual in nature. It can be a detour of hatred, or dishonesty, or greed, or almost anything, really. The Devil is **very** creative. He got the whole population of this planet into a train wreck with a piece of fruit! And one inch down a detour is one inch too far.

-Are you on a detour of some kind this morning—and you want to start a new, fresh year on the right path? Will you turn around—and will you start right now?

- c. Let me talk about one more thing that needs to go to the garbage can and left there. Grudges. Unforgiveness. Hatred. Slander. A longing for revenge. Hate crimes of the heart. From my perspective, this stuff clutters up the lives of people more than any other one thing I know of. Sometimes churches are absolutely polluted with this stuff. Ultimately, it kills them. Know why? Because it grieves, hurts and wounds the Holy Spirit—the very One who gives power and life and joy and hope.

-Please hear me—**if we don’t take out the trash**—if we don’t put all this junk where it needs to be, we ultimately lose our power, our life, our joy and our hope. Let me read what the Apostle Paul said to the church:

**And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to**

each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you (Eph. 4:30-32 NLT).

- 1) Earlier in this passage, he tells us what the entry point is for all this junk. Let me read it:

**And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil (Eph. 4:26-27 NLT).**

-What happens is that someone does something that hurts us or offends us—horrible, unfair things. And we get angry. Sometimes we don’t know what to do with that anger, or sometimes we are in families where we’re told it’s wrong to be angry (even though it’s clear that God gets angry)—so we just stuff it down inside.

-This stuff isn’t just the result of horrible offenses. Sometimes we’re angry because someone is better liked, richer, better-looking, further ahead. Anger can come from **all** sorts of sources; abuse, rejection, divorce—you name it.

-And when anger controls how we live and how we think, it gives a foothold to Satan. He has a little nook in our lives that he can be at home in. And he convinces us that all this junk we carry is legitimate—and we have a **right** to nurse a grudge until it’s a monster.

- 2) If we don’t find a way to **regularly** take out the garbage, this stuff takes up more and more and more room in our soul. And garbage doesn’t stay the same over time. It rots. It attracts rats and maggots and flies and disease. And when you carry all that garbage around—it’s **exhausting!**
- 3) I just need to ask you—how would you like for this to be **Amnesty Day**—when you can put out all the garbage—whatever kind of garbage you want to—and it will **all** go. It will **all** be cleaned up and carried away? Would you like that?

-The first step is **choosing** to **forgive**. Forgiveness doesn’t mean that you run after someone to try to tell them you’ve forgiven them and want to be their friend for life. Forgiveness is the first step we take where we choose to **let go of the garbage!**

-I’m going to be doing a whole series on forgiveness in May—but I just need to say one thing about it. The choice to forgive, to let it go, doesn’t immediately suck out all the poison that’s in your heart and leave you feeling **sparkling** clean! It may take some time before you **feel** the forgiveness. But it starts with a choice and a request for power. It starts with choosing not to trash—slander--the person or persons who have hurt you. To release them from what they’ve done. You’ll know it’s worked when, someday, you can wish them well.

- 4) I know exactly what some of you are thinking. “Yeah, Ken, but **you** don’t know what they did to me! What they did was **so** horrible, **so** despicable—it has scarred my whole life!” And I would have to say, “Yep! You have a prize offense, a prize grudge on your hands. But even a prize, blue-ribbon pig is still a pig. It acts like a pig, sounds like a pig and eats like a pig—and if you let it live in your house—you will ultimately live in a pigpen.

-Your soul is tender and soft and vulnerable—and it was not made for unforgiveness—grudges, bitterness, jealousy, hatred and slander. And for your soul to do its job in guiding you toward God—you **must** take out the garbage! Regularly! Will you? Would you do that today—as we celebrate the One who paid for the sin you’re carrying around?

- 5) There’s another form of unforgiveness that contaminates our hearts and our lives—and ultimately creates obstacles and detours. It’s when we can’t—or won’t—forgive ourselves. Every time we look in the mirror, we blame the person staring blankly back at us for doing stupid things. We call that person names like, “ugly,” “reject,” “loser,” “whore,” “pervert”—and worse. -And you need to know that you **can** forgive yourself, and you **need** to forgive yourself—that’s **God’s** will for you. You can’t live in the past. Has our past hurt us and others? Yep. Mine has. Do we deserve to be forgiven? Maybe not—but God says **yes!** And you need to drop the grudge you’re holding against yourself and put it out for the trash, too. You may need the help of a wise, loving follower of Jesus—but you can. And you really should. Maybe what you need most, as you come to this table, is to write out the list of your sins that seem to be burned into your conscience—and take the list to the **cross**. Where it belongs.

4. Does getting rid of your garbage at home ever bother you? It does me, to be honest. I think of the tons of it I’ve created in a lifetime. I imagine barges filled with it—dumped into the ocean. I imagine snowboarding down the mountains created by it somewhere in Michigan—or wherever they take it. At some point, I imagine it being blasted into space—with whole garbage planets created that eventually crash into the sun. Okay, I know, I’ve got a very **strange** imagination! -Wouldn’t it be cool if, like something out of **Back To The Future**, you could put it in your gas tank and run your car? Or, if the city could take it and burn it in such a way that it created electricity? Or, better yet, you could stuff it all in a bin in your basement and heart, light, and air condition your house!

-Well, I just need to tell you that God’s waste-management program is incredible. By the way, there’s **no recycling!** There’s no need for it! If you bring your obstacles, your detours, your grudges and anger and unforgiveness and self-hatred to Him—well, let me **read** what happens:

**You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19 NIV)** Know how deep that deepest part of the ocean is? It’s in the Mariana Trench, not far from Japan. It’s 1500 miles long, sixty miles wide, and 30,000 feet deep! You could drop Mount Everest in it, and it would totally disappear. It gets better!

**The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:8-12 (NLT)** Did

you get that? God's love for you—**higher than the heavens above the earth**. Look out to the most distant star—and that's only a tiny part of the distance—light years into space. And sin? In God's compassion and mercy—as far as the east is from the west. In the known universe, the **known** universe—that's 180 **billion** light years away. You won't have to worry about it.

So, what if you can't remember all the stuff you've done?

**If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness (1 John 1:8-9 NLT).**

When we own up to the failure and sin we **do** know—how much of our wickedness gets wiped up, washed away—dumped 180 billion light years into space? **All**. And that's because of Jesus. Because of the cross. Because He humbled Himself, invaded this planet as a tiny baby, and died at our Hands—as a Savior. One more verse. I think you'll like this one too:

**Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow (Psalm 51:7 NLT).**

5. Today, right now, I want to give you a chance to leave the garbage in 2006—and get a fresh start for 2007. I'm not talking about New Year's resolutions. That's dangerous. I'm talking simply about something you do every week—taking out the trash.

What I want you to do is write it down in private. All you want to leave here in this trash can. Write the names of people you want to release from how the hurt they've cause.

Who you're going to stop slandering. Who you're going to drop your bitterness and grudges toward, the obstacles you want to get out of your way, the detour you've taken—then wad it up.

-Bring it to the garbage can—where it belongs—throw it in. And we're going to burn it to a crisp. Then take the bread and cup—the ancient symbol of Jesus' body broken so **you** could be healed, his blood shed so **you** could be forgiven. And then dance. Celebrate the **lightness**. That the garbage is gone—along with all the bugs and rats and stench. Are we agreed? Be free, cause you **can** be!