Notes from sermon given by Ian Stackhouse January 14th 2007
Luke 10:25-42

I begin by recommending a book 'Faith that Endures' by Ronald Boyd-MacMillan which contains a challenge to the western church in all its busy-ness. In China Pastor Wang Ming Dao was put in solitary confinement for his faith during the Cultural Revolution. To counteract all our emails, diaries and our busyness, he urges us to push ourselves into a cell, as we will never be pushed into one, and we have who have no time to know God, take time to simplify our life and know God. Just as Jesus said to Martha, only one thing is needed – Build a cell, and know God.

Today we begin a journey through the parables, as Jesus teaches his disciples on the way to Jerusalem, where we shall arrive on Palm Sunday April 1st. This is not a philosophical treatise, or theology in the abstract, they are not the 'Wise Sayings of Jesus', we shall be listening to earthy stories of everyday life which his listeners and we can identify with.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for bandits, and everyone who was listening would recognise the scene. There was no surprise here, nor in that the priest, having finished his shift in the Temple, passes by on seeing the body. If he were to touch the possibly dead body, he would become unclean and would have to go back to the Temple to serve another two years before going home. The people would understand why he did this. Next a Levite passes by and he also has done the right thing, because according to the theology of the time, he didn't know if this man on the ground a neighbour? Only if he was one of them could he be someone he can serve. A theological text at the time commanded people not to help a godless man. So the Levite is captive to his own theology. Everyone listening would understand that this is the way the world is!

Surprisingly, Jesus introduces a Samaritan, cousins of the Jews who were despised by them. In recent times they had desecrated the temple by scattering bones in the Holy Place, so were worthy of contempt. Jesus' listeners thought that perhaps the Samaritan would show contempt for the half-dead man, but he is moved with compassion and looks after him. The parable shows the people of God something critical that worship is not about the minutiae of religion, real worship is not just what is offered in the Temple, but also what we offer when we pour out oil and wine on a half-dead body when no-one else is looking.

The sins of commission are well understood – the violence of the man who beat up the traveller; but the priest and the Levite committed sins of omission in their neglect of the victim. Holiness is not just keeping yourself separate, but it is loving people within the Church and outside, even loving your enemies. Does that mean we have no standards and no convictions? The people of God are not defined by what they are against (which is a pressure group), but that we are <u>for</u> Jesus, we are <u>for</u> people. Jesus affirms the interpretation of the Law – loving the Lord our God, and loving our neighbour as ourselves. However there is no-one who can do this – and it should bring us to our knees.

The question is - to whom can I become a neighbour, how do I love this person who confronts me now? Christian discipleship is about dealing with the person who is before me now, not wishing I was somewhere else, but allowing ourselves to be interrupted and inconvenienced, and loving them and giving them your whole attention.

Show justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.