

# **Pub**

**[Aim: to examine the contrast between those whose lives and work are traditionally rooted in one place and those who commute]**

## **Story**

**Jon, who lives in a rural village, but stays up in London during the week, was sitting in his local pub talking to some other people from the village. He was recounting stories of his close relationships with work colleagues and their plans to celebrate the Millennium by flying to South America for the party of a lifetime. For Jon, to whom travel is easy, accessible and necessary, life is impoverished if people do not network with others, explore other places and move from one location to another.**

**Jon then got into an argument with Danny, a young farm worker who had been born and brought up in the village, who had always worked there, and who had never travelled very far from his home. Jon argued that Danny's life was blinkered and insubstantial. He suggested that the rich, vibrant, ever-changing flow of city life, work life and having networks of other people for perpetual variety was what made life worth living. Danny argued that the depth of relationship afforded by commitment to one place and to its people, and to the communal life of the village was more important than Jon's frothy, fast-moving existence. He felt that Jon had just pushed into village life, taking what he wanted and consuming the village's goods and services without giving anything back. Jon was absent more often than**

present and therefore not a contributor to the community except of an irrelevant fantasy life of other places and unknown people. Danny said "we care about our own: you care about yourself". Jon, a forceful and articulate man, argued back that people like Danny were dinosaurs, part of a non-contributing backwater. He said Danny represented a reactionary and traditionalist set of people out of touch with the realities of modern living and claimed that in a few years the entire village would be owned by people like him. The dispute festered in the village, with Danny's mates seeing Jon's attitude as a direct attack on their values and their way of life. A week later, Jon's house was vandalised.

## **Discussion**

Changes affecting the whole of western society may come to different geographical areas of the country at different rates. One very large change is the availability of travel options and the fluid mobility of people to move between their places of home and work. Commuter options are so widespread that people may travel to major city centres from quite rural locations, or they may work sometimes from home, networking to business centres and work contacts. The effect of this is to divide people's lives into a series of important networks, of which "home" or the place where they usually live may be only one part. For those who have lived and worked in one place for many years and who are instrumental in building up and sustaining the community, engagement with people who live their lives in different locations may be challenging. They may only be interested in a "second home" from which they are largely absent. It can make it difficult for faithful members of a congregation to see clearly what contribution

commuters make to the life of the local church. Sometimes there are possibilities for enrichment of the community, but also for demoralisation and damage. Much depends on arbitrary labelling of people, such as commuters, as "insiders" going out or "outsiders" coming in. There are also questions of conflict resolution between opposing views. What kind of people have the ability to be reconcilers or peacemakers in situations like this?

The Bible contains many examples of different kinds of communities working out whether the best strategy is conflict, absorption or peaceful readjustment. Jesus too, asks for a hard look at what we think we mean by "neighbours" and the need for us to befriend and seek to understand the strangers in our midst. It is an important mission question what kinds of accommodation can properly exist between the incursion of commuters into traditional "rooted" communities and what part the life of the local church may have in this. Does the rooted community in fact have a depth of communal life which provides spiritual nourishment to people forced to spread themselves between the home and the work community? Where new developments are built near to existing villages, questions of mission strategy for the integration of the whole church community may become especially acute and may require particular pastoral sensitivity. Perhaps commuters working long hours and exhausted by travel do not need to be asked to shoulder more burdens from the local church, but perhaps they need secure and reliable childcare and support from their neighbours? Perhaps commuters bring new and refreshing ideas from other experiences in their lives which can inspire a rooted community?

## **Some ideas for Bible Study:**

**2.Kings 5**

**Luke 16: 19-31**

**Luke 15:11-end**

**Choose one or two questions for discussion:**

**If you won the lottery would you buy a house in the country, or a flat in a city? If so, why?**

**If you stay at home most of the day, do you wish you could go to other places? Say why you do or don't? What do you think about commuters or jet setters?**

**If you commute to work, do you wish you could stay at home? Say why you do or don't. What do you think about housewives/ househusbands or people who work from home?**

**Do you think this story is mainly about money? Say why you do or don't.**

**Possibilities for drama or role play:**

**Go over the story as Jon and Danny. What difference would it make if the characters were called Joanne and Sally or if the two protagonists were from different ethnic backgrounds?**

**What do you think Jon felt when his house was vandalised? What would he tell the police? What would he say to Danny next time he saw him? What would Danny say?**

**Reflection: How do you think God expects us to behave towards our neighbours? What makes us good neighbours? How does thinking about neighbours help us to be better witnesses to Christ?**

## **A Hymn and a Prayer**

**For example, *City of God, how broad and far*  
or *Jesus put this song into our hearts***

**God,**

**You go with us in all our travels. You are the stranger on the Damascus**

**Road,**

**and yet at home you wait for us, your arms open in welcome.**

**Help us to meet you everywhere we go.**

**Amen**