

# Reflections on Jonah

## Interserve worker Steven on the choice facing the Church



**It is Ramazan again and soon the 'iftal' meal to break the fast can begin.**

I walk out onto the balcony of our flat in the huge Muslim city in which we live. On the street behind our flat I can see people rushing home to be with their family for iftal. In the distance the traffic is at a standstill. Millions of people around the city are hurrying home, hoping that they arrive in time to break the fast.

Our flat perches on the edge of a steep hill. In idle moments I've tried to estimate how many flats I can see from my vantage point. I reckon I can see the living space for about 150,000 people. As far as I am aware, no other Christian lives within eyesight.

A few weeks ago as I flew into Heathrow with my family I was impressed by how visible the new Wembley soccer stadium was. If it were filled with a cross section of the British population and each Christian held a candle I suspect there would be around 10,000 or so candles – probably enough light to play a game of soccer. Across the city from where I stand there is a stadium of a similar size to Wembley. If that stadium were filled with a cross section of people from this country and each Christian carried a candle there would be just four candles in the entire stadium.

This scenario is repeated in many places where

Interserve works; there are not many candles burning. At the same time, however, God is working. I recently heard a testimony of a lorry driver who, as he was parking his lorry outside a hotel, noticed a man throw a package into the rubbish. He retrieved the package and discovered it contained a New Testament. He took it into his hotel room and started reading. He was enthralled by what he read. A few days later he called the Christians who had sent it, became a Christian, and is starting to get involved in his local church. The man who threw the package away was either a postman who recognised the package or someone disappointed not to find a \$100 bill enclosed (there is a widespread rumour here that churches bribe converts). Whatever the reason, God used that New Testament to touch the life of a lorry driver who was not even actively searching for him!

The numbers are big - but those numbers are made up of individuals whom God knows and loves and for whom Jesus died. All these people I watch rushing home to their special meal are intimately known and loved by God. As we, like Jonah, survey the masses, what will our reaction be? Jonah's reaction was one of anger when he no longer had access to the level of comfort he was used to. Can we really criticise him? The efforts of the Church in the West have too often been focussed on ourselves. Around 2% of church expenditure is on cross-cultural mission, which reflects how much we care about our vine. We don't want to lose our shade.

The story of Jonah ends very abruptly. When faced with the big numbers the Lord gently chastised him for his preoccupation with the vine. We don't know how Jonah reacts. Does he walk down the hill towards the city or does he turn his back in search of another vine? The challenge is there for us too. In which direction are we going to walk?