

Sermon for Sunday, May 17th, 2015. Gospel: John 17:6-19

The devastation of the recent earthquakes in Nepal got me thinking about my time in South Asia.

Living in India was amazing; but it was also, at times, rather frustrating. The second time I was there, I was on an academic fellowship that permitted me to work on my doctoral thesis research. That work required some intensive entrance into the life and culture of the people around me. And though that was generally a positive experience, it did often become extremely fatiguing. Living in an environment that was overwhelmingly over-crowded, with new foods, a new language, it was all so different.... Cows, goats, buffalo roaming the streets, monkeys stealing your clothes, all of this is at first intriguing, but after a time, it becomes exhausting. There are times when you just want to run away and hide. It becomes “too much.”

As it turns out, the secretary of the Institute in which I was based, was married to the manager of a major hotel in Kathmandu, Nepal, which was a 45 minute flight from Varanasi (the city in which I lived.) That became the refuge for those of us at the institute who needed to get away from time to time.

I observed some curious behavior on the part of some of my colleagues while we were there. Some isolated themselves in this expensive hotel, spending time at the pool, in the lounge and in the restaurants. They didn't want to experience what Nepal was like and they assumed it was no different from what we'd fled... I was pretty much alone in my desire to explore. When I invited them, they would say “no way, why would I want more of the same...I came here to get away from that...”

For me, the culture was sufficiently different, along with the language and religion and local mythology and geography, that it's exploration became for me an escape. In any case, as I often pointed out to my friends, “try as you may, you can never truly run away from the world in which you live.”

Join us this weekend where we explore Jesus' high priestly prayer, and its emphasis on the

believers' role in this world, while not being any more of this world. In essence, Jesus was teaching that you can never truly run away from the world in which you live, and trying may not be healthy.

Rev. Dr. Luther Symons