

Stones, Remember

Isabelle Hamley is the chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. She grew up in France. Amongst the countless words written as Notre Dame burned, I've found her's some of the most powerful. In particular, she names something of the significance of buildings that I would echo for Westminster's impact too:

"...we are people who remember. We may distort our memories, we may be selective, we may try to forget. But we remember. Sometimes in words, sometimes in pictures, sometimes in habits and symbols that have the power to bring out what we have buried deep. The memory of a people is not held simply in history books. It is held in the very land they inhabit, in its landscape, in its buildings. The suggestion I saw...that history is always there, we do

not need buildings to remind us of it, is but an expression of an old heresy, or of a destructive modern trend. It suggests that we are but spiritual beings, that the material world around us is something we may use, but that its destruction or absence does not matter because we, supreme beings, have the power to hold things in our... memory. It also seems to suggest that we can make ourselves what we want to be, regardless of what is, or isn't, around us. Both of these assumptions are deeply flawed. We are who we are through a complex interaction of the culture we live in, the history that has shaped it, the landscapes we inhabit, the languages - verbal and non-verbal - that we speak, the symbols that structure our ways of thinking and reasoning. And out of all of these elements, we weave



narratives that tell us who we are, why we are here, where we have come from, and, perhaps, where we are going. Notre Dame is a keystone of those narratives of French identity."

Westminster may be quite a building but, of course, it isn't Notre Dame. And yet, for well over a century, Westminster has also invited people to remember. Set so prominently in this ancient university community, Westminster speaks about faith wedded to learning, welcome ingrained in encounter, God caught sight of in the midst of everything. Our stones, too, speak. Remember, they say.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

*The Prophet
Jeremiah*

*chapter 29
verse 11*

Hatred cannot overcome



Across the world, extremism that destroys people and communities has cruelly done its work of terror: shootings in mosques in New Zealand; arson destroying African American churches in Louisiana; churches and hotels bombed in Sri Lanka; a synagogue shooting in San Diego County.

Powerful forces are at work in our world.

Hatred is killing. Lies are common. Some of this wears faith's clothing. Some claims God's name and blessing. There are many reasons why our work with people of every faith, any faith and no explicit faith matters. Here's a starkly simple one: if we open our hearts and lives to others we learn, better, how to live together. As a place devoted to teaching future generations of leaders of faith communities, Westminster's campus must always be a place of such encounter. This isn't just a nice way to use our land or dining hall. It's a response of hope that hatred cannot overcome.

