

Dear friends,

I share with you that after the Ash Wednesday zoom service yesterday afternoon I had later on a zoom meeting with my nephew and his son (my great nephew), who has just turned just 5years old. My great nephew was very excited at seeing me but after a few minutes he put his face very close up to the screen and looked at me intently and then asked me, "Have you banged your head uncle Neil?", I said, "No, why do you think that?" With his face still very close to the screen he said he could see a mark on my forehead. I then remembered that I still had the ash cross on my forehead which I'd made as part of the zoom service earlier. I told him what it was and why it was there and he turned very confidently to his dad and told him that he wanted a cross on his forehead like uncle Neil's and with that he ran off out of camera shot. After a few minutes he was back on his dads knee and before my nephew could stop him, with a large black crayon my great nephew made a cross on his own forehead.

It was a beautifully shared moment, but I'm not quite sure what my great nephews mum would have thought about seeing him after he'd been on the zoom meeting with uncle Neil. What he did, in such an innocent but a very real and visible way, a way really that only children sometimes can, was to show that the sign of the cross, be it in ash or be it in crayon, is what connects us all. It is what refocuses us during this time of Lent.

With all what has been happening to us individually and together over the past year, maybe this time of Lent might well give to us some space and time to refocus in prayer and reflection in our own lives. I share with you that one of the things I said at the Ash Wednesday services was that when we make the sign of the cross on our foreheads what we are in effect doing is visibly reconnecting with our own baptisms. The moment in our baptism service when we, or maybe our Godparents on our behalf, made promises that we would turn to Christ.

So however you might be keeping Lent this year, be it in taking time out to read the Bible, making time to pray, joining one of the church or Zoom services, whatever it might be, be assured that I'll holding you in my daily morning prayers, for us all to become ever more aware of our interconnectedness as a church family, as brothers and sisters, as children of God.

I've scheduled another zoom meeting with my nephew and great nephew in a couple of weeks' time, I'm just hoping that by then that the crayon has washed off! But I'm sure he will remember and probably tell his friends, what he did that day on a zoom meeting with his great uncle Neil.

Love & prayers

Revd Neil

