



## POST-GATHERING BIBLE STUDY

This Bible Study was written by the Revs. Aneeta Saroop and Nathan Fong, keynote speakers for *CLAY 2023: Ashes and Embers*, in partnership with the CLAY 2023 National Planning Committee. It is for Home Teams to make use of as you return home from, reflect on, and share your experiences of this summer's gathering. Feel free to adapt and adjust how you use this resource to your group's size, setting and personality!

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We're back! Back, and undoubtedly a little wiser, a little older, and maybe with a few more friends. We've laughed, some of us cried, and maybe we learned a little bit about ourselves, about God, and the relationship we share in this community of God's people that we all belong to. But the journey isn't over! We continue to learn and grow in our faith and to discover the different ways God can be seen in the ashes and embers of our daily lives.

1. What was the most memorable moment/event of the Gathering for you? Why?
2. How would you describe your experience of the Gathering to people who weren't there? What images and themes popped out for you?

The hope of any church is to help people more easily see God in the world around them, and also hopefully in each other. We all know that God is somewhere, but we don't often recognize God's presence with us, among us, and around us. Hopefully the Gathering helped to increase your ability to rely on God's strength, grace, and love.

3. In what ways (if any) did you see God present during the Gathering? In the people that you met? At home with your family and friends?
4. How has God been active in your life, in hindsight? Knowing what you know now (but perhaps didn't know before), how has God provided for you in the past?

The truth is, God's presence among us—abiding with us, and guiding us along paths of righteousness and peace—is eternal; it always has been and always will be. We just might not have noticed it or recognized it in the past. But actually seeing it and pointing it out helps make us feel closer to each other as God's people, increase our sense of belonging in God's community, and recognize one another as an integral part of the body of Christ. We are joined together in the ashes and embers and all parts of our lives for support and care.



**READ: John 17:1-11**

*After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.*

*"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

This passage is what is known as the "Priestly Prayer," where Jesus prays for his disciples as he prepares for the road toward the cross, resurrection, and ascension. The disciples might have felt a little awkward, eavesdropping on Jesus' conversation with God, but they were able to catch a glimpse of the hope that Jesus had for them, of the plan that God has for all of us, and of what is to come.

If they were able to understand that Jesus was about to leave them, they would probably have been scared, anxious, and awfully distressed. But this prayer assures them (and us) that while we might feel alone and abandoned at different points in our lives, we are not defined by those feelings, but rather by the love and welcome of God.

Because in God, by God, and to God, **we belong.**

5. What are some of the ashes in our lives that we would be willing and comfortable to share?
6. Where in these ashes do we see the embers of God's love bringing us life, joy, and hope?

While many of us may not have as much life experience as others, we might already know that life isn't easy and we are at times thrown in for a wild and crazy ride. And while those difficult times aren't wanted or enjoyed, we can rest assured that God is with us in them—through the love of others, the support of community, and the joining together we all share through the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.

**Let us pray,**

*Lord God, you are our Shepherd, Saviour, and Spirit, and you are with us throughout our lives. Remind us always of your providence and love that is present in our churches, communities, and even just in ourselves, that we be always aware of your hand at work in the world, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.***