



Introduction

The Bible story of Pentecost (as detailed in Acts 2:1-47) details the moment when a small group of frightened believers were transformed into a missionary movement that took its message around the world. But how did the teachings of a Jewish fringe cult leap cultural barriers so easily and quickly? The Bible narrative declares that God's Holy Spirit suddenly filled the believers when they were praying, enabling them to speak in many languages (a 'babble'), so they could immediately spread their infectiously exciting message among a multinational crowd of pilgrims. This 'coming of the Holy Spirit' during the Jewish festival of Shavuot (in Greek, 'Pentecost') can be thought of as the global Christian Church's birthday, which makes it a significant festival in itself.

This 'speaking in many tongues' is a direct reflection of an earlier (mythical?) story about the arrival of different languages among people, as told in the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) when the Lord God afflicts the human race with a variety of languages to stop them getting too ambitious. (In Hebrew, the word 'Babel' means 'confused' and is associated with the name of the ancient city of Babylon. In English, the word 'babble' comes from the same story.)

So, the Christian festival of Pentecost celebrates the 'reunion' of the scattered human race, as people are drawn together again into one global Christian family of many languages and cultures, sharing one heavenly father. This story for collective worship provides you with an alternative introduction to the story of Pentecost, which should then be told on the following day or later that week.

Preparation

You will need a set of Jenga blocks set up on a table, away from the children but visible to all. The larger garden variety is best but care is the needed with children's seating arrangements in case a block should fall and hit a small child sitting nearby. You might like to consider sitting the children in a large semicircle or horseshoe shape for visibility and safety. A displayed picture of [The Tower of Babel by Breughal](#) makes an excellent backdrop.

Development

As you tell the story, build the blocks in the shape of a large step-pyramid, similar to the sort unearthed by archaeologists in the Middle East... but don't finish it.

When we want to greet someone, we often just say 'hallo', but if you listen to people at an airport or station, for example, you will hear them greeting each other in different languages. Why do we speak in different languages? People have been wondering about this since the beginning of time, and are still wondering now. Here's an old story that tries to explain why in picture-language, which leads into another, later story.

We humans like to compare ourselves with one another:



- Who can run faster than others?
- Who can jump further?
- Who can win a football game?
- Who is taller?
- Who knows the most answers to quiz questions?

It's fun to win when this is done in the spirit of a game and is kept light-hearted, but people can sometimes be vain and/or jealous of what they or others can do or have. For example, thousands of years ago, some people tried to build buildings that were higher than existing buildings. There's a story in the Bible about one such high tower. It's said to have stood in the city of Babel... or Babylon. It goes something like this.

Once, long ago, a great king and his people decided to build a great tower and city greater than anything ever seen before. Their 'artificial' mountain, the tower of the city of Babel, would reach up to the heavens and be the centrepiece of an amazing city where all the people of the world could live. 'Babel will be the greatest power in the world!' said the king and his officials, and so the work began, drawing in workers and materials from across the empire. Day by day, the tower grew taller and taller and the city's buildings stretched further and further across the plain. 'I'll be like a god!' thought the king, 'nothing is going to stop me now! Look at all the amazing things I can do!'

But the Lord God saw what they were doing... and became very worried. 'This is just the beginning' said the Lord. 'Soon they'll be getting even worse ideas.' And so the Lord went down and made the people of Babel all start speaking in different languages, so the builders couldn't understand each other. The building of the tower and the city stopped - and the people scattered across the globe. This is why the word 'Babel' or 'babble' means 'confused' - because the people couldn't understand each other. So the tower remained unfinished, and remains so to this day.

(Stop building the tower.)

This is a strange story - we don't know how each language has developed and language changes all the time, but perhaps we can learn one thing from the story of the tower of Babel: we need a common language to understand each other and work together. And perhaps it's a story about not being proud. The people of Babel had forgotten God and thought they could manage everything on their own - they thought they didn't need God. There are many people today who think like this and try to make themselves more important than other people, and have more possessions. So, perhaps they're a bit like the people of Babel - confused and don't know what to do!

But there is another story in the Bible that comes much later - and talks of God drawing people together to live and work as a giant family again - and all of a sudden, the languages stop being a problem but we'll hear more about that another day.

Meditation

Think about the things that make it hard for people to work together.



- Can you remember a time when people didn't listen to each other and it all went wrong?
- Just imagine if everyone in your class spoke a different language: How could you play together? How could you learn anything?

That's why learning to listen and understand each other is so important - because without it, we can't do anything.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we're all so different here. We have so many different ways of thinking and doing. Help us to really listen to each other, to care for what other people are feeling and saying - so we can be a place where love can grow. Amen.