

The New People of God

by Ben Barwick

KEY VERSE:

Acts 2:4

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

FAITH STORY:

Acts 2:1-13

FAITH FOCUS:

This scripture passage tells the beginning of the creation of the New People of God. The disciples were at a gathering together when suddenly the Holy Spirit entered into the building amongst them. Each of them was given the ability to speak in foreign languages. Jesus had told them earlier, as he was leaving, that he would send the Spirit to them and it would empower them to be his witnesses. This arrival of the Holy Spirit fulfilled his words. They spoke to the Jews that gathered around them who were from every nation. The crowd was amazed and astonished, but some also questioned them, thinking that they were drunk.

SESSION GOAL:

To help the students realize how God is miraculously creating a new people through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Papers with random words chosen from the dictionary—one for each student—and a list of those words on a separate piece of paper.
- 2 Wipe board and marker
- 3 Bibles
- 4 Papers and pencils
- 5 Birthday cake, piñata, punch, other birthday party items from as many different cultural traditions as you can find. Find out how to say "Happy Birthday" in different languages.

SESSION PLAN

FOCUS:

Welcome everyone, greet them, and check in briefly about their lives. Then hand out the slips of paper with the different words to all youth. Instruct the youth that they are supposed to try to communicate to each other what their word is *without talking* to each other. (They cannot show the word to anyone either.) They cannot talk at all until someone says the word on their paper. While this is happening, take each student away from the group quietly and individually and place them somewhere in the church by themselves. Explain to them that they cannot return to the room or talk to anyone until their word is spoken by someone.

After giving the group plenty of time to be alone in silence, begin to call words from the list. Walk through the church so students can hear the words being called.

CONNECT:

When everyone is back in the room, ask: *Do you know a story from the Bible when people were suddenly given different languages?* (Students may mention either the Tower of Babel or the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. Affirm both answers.)

Invite students to look up the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9.

Discuss:

- *Why did God confuse the people with different languages?*
- *Why do you think God would use such a harsh punishment?*
- *What effects did this punishment have on the people?*
- *What are some ways we compete with God in our lives?*
- *What are some ways the punishment is still in our lives today?*
- *How did it feel to be taken out of the room and to wait to hear someone speak your word?*

After you have finished discussing these questions, say this: *So, that's the Tower of Babel story. Do you know the second half of the story?*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Read Acts 2:1-13, then read it a second time. Before the second reading, hand out papers and pencils and ask students to listen closely and write down observations or questions they have about the passage. After the reading, record students' observations on a wipe board.

Discuss the following points:

- The passage's relation to the Tower of Babel.
- The importance of Pentecost in the Christian faith.

Wrap up the discussion with these points:

- *Pentecost is the creation of the New People of God: it is the birth of the Christian church.*
- *The Holy Spirit was gifted to us and, like the law of the Old Testament, it became the leader of the Church.*

APPLY:

Write the following questions on the wipe board and ask students to copy them to their paper:

- When was a time that you wish you had relied on the Holy Spirit, or when you did rely on the Holy Spirit for direction?
- Does the church created by God rely on the Holy Spirit for direction like it should?
- Do you think our church relies on the Holy Spirit? In what ways? Or how could we be more dependent on the Holy Spirit?

Ask students to take their pen and paper and return to the place in the church where they were earlier. Ask them to reflect and journal on the questions:

RESPOND:

Now that the students have a further understanding of Pentecost, it is time to celebrate the birth of the Church. When they return from their journaling, throw a party to commemorate Pentecost. Utilize as many different cultures as you can in this party—after all, that's the whole point of Pentecost!

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Pentecost takes place on the Jewish holiday of Feast of Weeks, which is one of the three celebrations that God commanded the Hebrews to observe (Exodus 23:10-19). The feast was held after the spring harvest and was meant to be a feast of thanksgiving and giving of the first fruits to God. After the Hellenistic period, the celebration of the Feast of Weeks became a celebration of the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Pentecost parallels the creation of the Old People of God—who are the Hebrew, Israelites, and

Jewish people—and also fulfills the fall of humanity from Genesis. The speaking in tongues parallels the confusion of languages for the people at the Tower of Babel. The wind and fire parallel the wind and fire of the Red Sea story. Finally, the giving of the Holy Spirit parallels the giving of law at Mount Sinai.

Pentecost signals the beginning to the creation of the New People of God, today called the Christians; it is the fulfillment of Christ's life and a day worth celebrating. The Old People of God (the Jewish people) were given the law to follow, but they were unable to keep it. So God sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit into the world and created the New People of God—the Church.

For further information on Pentecost and its paralleling refer to a Bible dictionary such as Eerdmans or Harper Collins.