Pentecost May 14, 2023

**Bible Verses:** Acts 2:1-13, 43-47

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 502 to 505

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **We are the church – you, me, everyone!**

There are certainly plenty of aspects of the Pentecost story that are ear-catching (Fire over people’s heads! Many languages!) but we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that this day marks the birth of the church. Pentecost is not only the culmination of the leadership transition that began with Jesus’ ascension at the end of Matthew/Luke, it can also be read as a revision to the Tower of Babel all the way back in Genesis 11 (see Bible Background for more). What this day reminds us of is that *all* of us – not just the apostles – have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, which also means that we are empowered and inspired to do ministry in our own contexts today. All of us fall into the trap of thinking about church as a building or place; today, though, we remember that a church can only be church if it is made up of committed and faithful people.

* **God’s Spirit helps us be disciples and be the church.**

The Holy Spirit is described in a wide variety of ways throughout the biblical text: John refers to the Holy Spirit as “the Advocate” and says that the Spirit will be a teacher and a reminder of everything that Jesus taught. Luke shares that the Spirit will “empower” the disciples to spread the Gospel, emphasizing a strength and uplifting that comes from the Spirit’s presence. Finally, Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians – best known from our Fruits of the Spirit song from chapel! The fruits are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – all things that should bear out in our lives if we have the Spirit with us. Taken together, the New Testament speaks to the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives as helping us follow and emulate Jesus today – and so we are grateful for that gift today!

* **Reflecting on how the early church grew**

For me, the astronomical growth of the early church has always been a point of deep fascination – how did a handful of people (well, a hundred-ish) located in and around Jerusalem go on to successfully spread Jesus’ message around the globe. For context, there were an estimated 7,500 Christians by the end of the 1st century, 6 million by the end of the 3rd century, and approximately 2 billion Christians today. Those numbers are staggering – but they’re made all the more staggering when you remember that the Gospel spread first and foremost by individual relationships rather than by popular preachers. All of us are important witnesses to Jesus’ message in our own lives – and the way that we choose to live, behave, and treat others will make all the difference for how some people understand what it means to be “Christian”.

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
  + Younger kids: What are you looking forward to this summer?
  + Older kids: Highs and Lows from the past week
* **We’re learning about Pentecost and people hearing messages in different languages… does anyone know a different language?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* This is our final Sunday of our regular Sunday School year – and today we’re covering the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church on Pentecost!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* I’m guessing those who were there would have reacted in a lot of ways: being confused, scared, hopeful, or maybe even excited! How would *you* have felt if you were there on the Day of Pentecost? Why?
* If you were being asked to start churches across the world, what would you ask the Holy Spirit to help you with?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* We may not all be able to speak other languages fluently, but how we can show God’s love so that anyone can understand?
* Do you think everyone should have a responsibility to lead/help with church work, or should it just be a pastor’s responsibility? How can Pentecost remind us that *all* of us have the Holy Spirit, not just a few?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* Pentecost is often thought of as the birth of the church because the Holy Spirit arrival means that God is always with us, helping us live like Jesus taught. Think of the “Fruits of the Spirit” – what of those things (love, joy, peace, etc.) are easy for you? What do you need help with?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions / Activity**

* **Take some time to welcome / get to know the kids!**
  + Before we start, I just want to say that it’s been amazing being able to be together this year. I’m grateful for all of you – we’ve learned a lot together! Any favorite songs or Bible stories from our year?
  + Some people call Pentecost the church’s birthday… which means church is almost 2,000 years old! What do you think is different about church today? What do you think is the same?

**Warm Up Game – Pictionary**

* The drama of Pentecost lends itself to drawing, so you can play Pictionary with the kids using the whiteboard or just drawing on a sheet of paper:
  + Church
  + Fire
  + Wind
  + Jesus
  + Fruits of the Spirit
* Play as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Our last Bible lesson is about the Holy Spirit coming to be with people on the day of Pentecost – and the Spirit helped them become the church! **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!
* Have you ever heard someone speak a different language? What was it like to not understand what they were saying?
* The Holy Spirit helps us be Jesus’ disciples and to be the church, showing us how to live by “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”. Who else helps teach you (or show you) some of those things?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Kate Christensen-Martin**

As we celebrate and acknowledge all of the mothers and mother figures in our lives today, we’ll also take a moment to learn about a current pastor who has seen mothering as an important example of what it means to be Christian.

Christensen-Martin grew up in Oregon, but her mother was unfortunately diagnosed with brain cancer when she was 12. After caring for her mother for years, Christensen-Martin took off her senior year of high school to help provide hospice care – and her mom passing away had a significant impact on her life.

She also faced additional challenges when she married a young pastor and soon found herself in the uncomfortable role of “pastor’s wife” – she was silenced at church but expected to do a great deal. She began to learn more about the church’s history of marginalizing women, even though many of Jesus’ early disciples and followers were women – and she began to believe that God was calling her into ministry.

Eventually, she and her husband decided to leave the church and begin their own church out of their home – all while trying to care for their four boys. It was a risk – but it was also worth it to create a community where they could affirm that everyone was important and valued for who they are. As co-pastors, Christensen-Martin and her husband began to teach others about the long history of God’s Spirit being talked about using feminine language – and the importance of thinking about God in terms of being Mother and not just Father.

“Jesus called God ‘*Father’* because people had been taught that God was far away and distant”, she once explained, “but Jesus wanted people to know that God is near, as near as a parent – a mother or father – tenderly holding their child close.” As we remember and celebrate Mother’s Day today, Christensen-Martin reminds us that all of us are called to demonstrate a mother’s love towards one another – “Go be a mother”, she often says.

Crafts / Activities

**Pentecost Flame Headband**

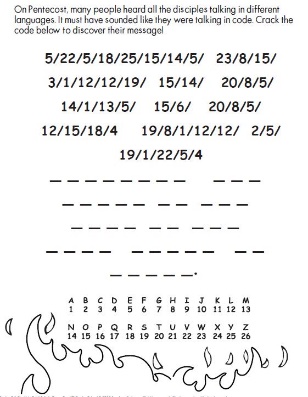
**(Ages 3+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Scissors
* Crayons/Markers
* Tape or Glue

Instructions:

* This craft will require a little parental help; print, cut out, and color the pieces of the headband – then have an adult help with the assembly!

**Pentecost Number Puzzle**

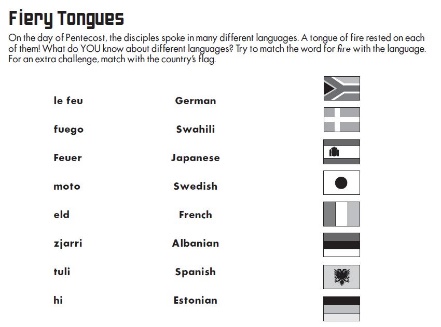
**(Ages 5+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Marker

Instructions:

* This number puzzle isn’t terribly complex (A = 1, etc.), but it’s long enough to engage kids for a decent amount of time.

**Pentecost Languages Puzzle**

**(Ages 7+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Marker

Instructions:

* This puzzle will likely only be possible if kids have access to a search engine on their computer or phone, but it can be a fun way to learn a little bit more about countries around the world (namely, their flags and the word for “fire” in that country’s language).

Biblical Background – Pentecost[[1]](#footnote-2)

The Day of Pentecost is a perfect scripture passage to conclude our school year – in part because Pentecost references or fulfills a great deal of texts from both the Old and New Testaments (making it a good summary), and in part because it gives a message of empowerment and inspiration for all of us as disciples! Here are some of the scriptural allusions and references that are present:

**Genesis 11** – Pentecost can be read as a sort of reversal to the Tower of Babel story. In Genesis 11, humanity becomes a bit too ambitious and builds a giant tower up to the sky (the closer something was to the sky in the ancient world, the closer it was to heaven/divine– same goes for mountains). As punishment, God scatters the people and gives them different languages so they aren’t able to collaborate like that again. On Pentecost, however, we see all peoples tied back together once more despite their varying languages and countries of origin.

**Joel 2:28-32** - Peter directly quotes the prophet Joel in his explainer following the Pentecost event, but makes a handful of tweaks to Joel’s words to emphasize that the fulfillment of this prophecy is taking place right now in their midst. Joel’s original context is unknown, but the wider message of the book was focused on a coming “Day of the Lord” which would change everything.

**Isaiah / Psalms** – I’ve cheated a bit and lumped both Isaiah (specifically “Third Isaiah”, Isaiah 56-66) and the Psalms together here… Peter’s speech also lifts up several verses that are, at minimum, reminiscent of language used in both texts. This is noteworthy, particularly in the case of Isaiah, because Isaiah was lifted up a coming day when God’s kingdom would see its fulfillment.

**Acts 1:8 / John 14** – Although Luke probably wasn’t aware of the specific language that John uses in his gospel, Jesus’ final words in both Luke-Acts and John point to the arrival of the Holy Spirit as God empowering the disciples to undertake the work of spreading the Gospel out to the ends of the earth.

As with Jesus’ resurrection on Easter, Pentecost marks an entirely new relationship between God and humanity – for that, it is a day of celebration!

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)