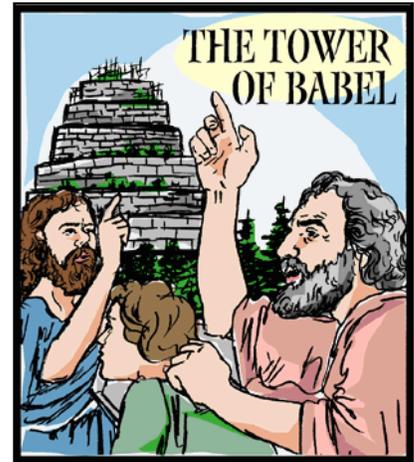


## Background Information:

**Bible Text:** Genesis 11:1-9 NIV, and Acts 2:1-42

**Memory Verse:** *“I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”*  
*Joel 2:28 NIV*



”The nucleus of the (Tower of Babel) tale is the telling how “the children of men (v.5), still undivided into people, decided to build a tower with its top in the heavens to make a name for themselves (v.4). For this act of arrogance the Lord scattered them abroad . . . over the face of all the earth (v.8).” \*TIB Vol. 1, p. 562

Another stream operating within the Tower story is the sin of pride. It is directly addressed by the Lord and the punishment is long lasting. We do not understand each other. I suspect that someone asked the question: “How did it happen, that there are so many languages that people cannot understand each other?” The Tower of Babel is a story answer to this question.

The story is a simplistic answer to the development of the variety of languages. It condenses a complex process in language development into a quick story. Do you think the languages of “Mars” and “Venus” were easily developed or so simply remedied?

But the emphasis is that the Lord stepped into the world and stirred up their language so they could not understand each other. The Lord imposes this confusion, this separation. This story gives an explanation for the multiple languages while recognizing that the source of all things is the Lord’s. The Tower of Babel story also demonstrates the position of humans in regards to the Lord. We are the subject and the Lord is the king.

The story of the Tower “embodies a truth of permanent validity” the futility and emptiness of human effort divorced from the acknowledgment and service of God” commented Calvin. “They do not speak our language” implies something more than a difference in vocabulary or the way our sentences are constructed; it implies a sense of alienation in thought, a gulf cut across the whole area of instinctive feelings on which people and nations need to stand to be on common ground.

Language is vital to our lives as human beings. We think, and our use of words and logic helps us to organize, synthesize and communicate our thoughts. Words

and their mutual understanding, help us as social beings to live and operate together. Words are God's gift.

Think of the careful way the Bible presents speech. "In the beginning. . ." God spoke and it happened. This is a powerful word. When the people of Israel were given their identification through 10 Commands, The "Name" (another word) and honest speaking about your neighbor are vital parts of being God's people. "The word of the Lord came to me" is a familiar beginning for the prophets. John's Gospel begins with the "Word" and proclaims the Word was in the beginning, was instrumental in creation, came to live among us, and the Word from God is Jesus.

Pentecost, which this year is celebrated by the Church on May 20th, continues the theme of language. Now, 50 days after the Resurrection, the Word is spoken and heard. If you have language skills (even a phrase) you could illustrate the difficulty in understanding others. Sign language ("Jesus Loves You") is another vehicle of communication of the good news, Good Word! Pictures may be able to communicate, but words can define.

Be sure to ponder Acts 2:2. The Lord again acts. The Lord sends the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit's power the "gathered ones" begin to speak. By the Spirit's power this speaking is understood. Therefore, by God's action the Word is revealed and understood. Jesus, the Risen Lord, is conveyed to the gathered mixture of people. Where 'dis-unity' occurred at the Tower of Babel, now unity occurs by the action of God's Spirit.

"But of all people in the world, Christians have the most reason to be hopeful, for the story of Pentecost is the story of forces drawing people together in a kind of unity that empowered them to resist the forces that were destroying them. To remember Pentecost is to revive our hope and to reproduce Pentecost now would be to fulfill that hope.

"Two things draw people together, a common danger and a common devotion. Danger drives them together. Devotion draws them together voluntarily?  
"Christians are people who are drawn together by a common devotion. 'They were all with one accord in one place.'" (v.1) \*TIB Vol 9, p.38

Everyone understood each other. How wonderful! They understood because they were all talking about the same thing: the wonderful acts of God! Do we need to raise our level of thought and speech to get above the "little" things and into the bigger things?

Vv 9-11 list names of areas surrounding the Mediterranean. Each of these regions or countries would have their own language. Each pilgrim, they were in Jerusalem for worship, would come expecting to be spiritually enriched and seeking to contribute the honor of their worship to God. Suddenly they found much more than a mechanical process of worship - sacrifices at the temple. They heard the exciting story of Jesus and God's love, a call for repentance and baptism. They clearly heard and understood the story of Jesus in their own tongue.

God brings unity! Praise be to God! Soli deo Gloria!

\*The Interpreter's Bible Library of Congress Card # 51-12276 Published by Abingdon Press, Nashville 1952.

*This message has been edited. Last edited by: [Augustana Lutheran Church](#), July 11, 2008 11:12 AM Beth Tobin, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Olympia, WA April 21, 2010. Updated May 2, 2018.*