I get a little nervous about Pentecost because this whole “being filled with the Holy Spirit” business seems a bit out there and extraverted. No matter where you look people are making spectacles of themselves. The Disciples are running through the streets with such exuberance that many suppose them to be drunk. In the Old Testament lesson, we have Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp to such an extent that Joshuah son of Nun goes to Moses with a noise complaint asking for them to be shut down. It all seems a little gauche. Honestly, I am much more comfortable with Psalm 46 telling us to be still than I am with all this drawing attention to ourselves. So, I want to ask the question that every Episcopalian would like answered and that is can one be filled with the Holy Spirit and not be, you know…. tacky. Well, let’s see.

To frame things, it would be good to start with a little background. You probably know this, but Pentecost is actually a Jewish holiday and is often called Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks. It occurs fifty days after the beginning of Passover. Since Christians build the fifty days off of Jesus’ resurrection our day for Pentecost differs slightly from that found in Judaism where, this year, Pentecost began at sundown on May 25th. What is commemorated is obviously different as well. The Jewish holiday celebrates several things like the giving of the Torah and the grain harvest whereas, in Christianity, it is a little more specific, being solely focused on the coming of the Holy Spirit. And that coming of the Holy Spirit is where we pick things up today in our readings.

As best we can tell the disciples, since the Resurrection, had been spending most of their time just kind of sitting around. So, it seems natural that when the Holy Spirit does come, He gets them moving. And in getting them moving He also equips them with skills they previously lacked like the ability to speak in languages they had been unable to speak. That is when we hear the line, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” To summarize we start with the Disciples sitting around, then the Holy Spirit comes and because of this they rush out into the street equipped with skills they previously had not possessed. And so, to circle back for a moment to a slightly modified version of my original question regarding the Episcopalian concerns with such evangelistic behavior: Is the behavior remembered today the only way we can be filled with the Holy Spirit? In other words, is the Holy Spirit only around to equip us to run out into the streets and talk in languages with which we were previously unfamiliar? Obviously, the answer is no. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not so limited. The Nicene Creed in describing the Holy Spirit says nothing about running into the streets but rather calls the Holy Spirit, “the Lord, and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.” Put another way the Nicene Creed tells us that the Holy Spirit is God, but is also different from God the Father and God the Son. We will get into that much more and how it works next week on Trinity Sunday but for now let’s look at that most modern of questions: If I don’t have to run into the streets what can the Holy Spirit do for me? To answer this, I think we need to look at the words of Jesus when he describes what exactly will be the Spirit’s role.

The quote I want to examine from Jesus comes in John’s Gospel. It says, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” In many ways Jesus’ explanation of the Holy Spirit is that He represents a continuation of Jesus’ ministry on earth. The Holy Spirit will remind but will also continue the teaching that Jesus began. And this is not in the role of some sort of divine substitute teacher but, as the Nicene Creed tells us, in the role of God. Think about it like this: Jesus’ earthly ministry was a moment in history. It occurred in a very specific time and place -- lasting for about three years and occurring in an area roughly the size of the Big Island in Hawaii. And if that is all God did, it would have been very nice. Jesus came to earth, was crucified for our sins and left Disciples to explain what had happened in his life, death and resurrection. And in many ways, I think many Christians see this as what happened. We go to Church and hear some things about Jesus which will come in handy when we die and then we just go back to living our lives. But that is not how Jesus explains it. His coming was the start, not the finish. With the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are not to preserve what happened in amber but rather to live into God’s call and continue growing. The story keeps going.

I know this is an idea I return to now and again, so I am sorry. The idea comes from St. Gregory of Nyssa and is called *epektasis*. It’s a Greek word and is seen in such places as Philippians 3:13 where Paul famously says, “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.” *Epektasis* is that straining forward. When we talk about our faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit it is not about a historical event but is rather about straining forward. Gregory of Nyssa posited that our lives both here on earth and in heaven would be ones of continually growing into God. If you think about it in the context of today’s lesson from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples, as we said, were basically doing nothing until the Holy Spirit came. They were living in the time between the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is only when the Holy Spirit comes that the story picks up again and they move forward. And this is the same for us. Pentecost, while remembering a historical event, also reminds us that we are part of a continuing story. I don’t know what the continuing of the story will look like for you, because I don’t even know what it will look like for me, but it should look like straining forward. There should be growing into God.

This past Wednesday we remembered Bishop Jackson Kemper. He was the first missionary bishop of the Episcopal Church as well as the first bishop of Wisconsin. His signature adorns our founding document at the back of the church. His story is rather remarkable, and I think gives a very vivid example of what straining forward looks like. He was born in 1789 in upstate New York and ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church in 1812. As the United States expanded west in the 1800’s there was great hesitation on the part of Episcopal clergy to leave the relative comfort of the eastern seaboard. Kemper was consecrated as the first missionary Bishop of the Episcopal Church in 1835 and given the job to plant churches in places where there were no priests nor buildings. At one time his territory encompassed Indiana, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Nebraska. He worked tirelessly founding schools and churches as well as raising up leaders from amongst those who were already in the wilds of places like Wisconsin. Here are a few statistics. He organized six dioceses, consecrated nearly a hundred churches, ordained more than two hundred priests and deacons, and confirmed almost 10,000 individuals. He once traveled for four days in order to confirm a young person in northern Wisconsin. I don’t know if he ever ran out in the streets proclaiming Jesus in other languages, but I do know that he vigorously continued the story of Christianity. The coming of the Holy Spirit tells us that the story is not over and that we are to grow into God this day and forevermore.