

Fursey Pilgrimage 2018
Address given by the Revd Rosie Bunn
Rector of [St Peter & St Paul, Burgh Castle](#) and [All Saints, Belton](#)

I want to begin by asking you a question!

What set Fursey apart, that we are here today remembering him?

The historian Bede talks about people being *“inspired by the example of his (Fursey’s) goodness and the effectiveness of his teaching; many unbelievers were drawn to Christ, and those who already believed were drawn to greater love and faith in him”*.

It seems to me that very early in his life, Fursey fell in love with God. We can read about his keenness to read and study the scriptures, and to grow in his knowledge and faith. We know that he founded a monastery at Killursa in County Galway, Ireland and that after a series of visions – out of body experiences - that occurred in his early twenties, he became passionate about sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ; preaching with urgency and authority.

The quality of his teaching brought a great popularity, and this he found difficult. As a consequence, he retreated to seek God’s guidance and it was from there he was prompted to become “a pilgrim for the love of God” and the adventure of travel and pilgrimage began.

Let’s set the context of the journey made by Fursey and his brothers. They travel from the west coast of Ireland to the east coast of England to this area where a new Christian King is seeking to establish himself and the Christian faith. Danish invasions and military occupations had been part of the history of the east coast and the Anglo Saxon kingdom of East Anglia ruled by King Sigebert, and later King Anna, gave Fursey (and also Felix in Suffolk) an opportunity to lay secure foundations of Christianity in our region.

Our Gospel reading of the Beatitudes (Mathew 5: 1-16) I believe would have been close to Fursey’s heart. Jesus’ announcements of wonderful news -

Wonderful news! Those who know their need of God, the kingdom of God is yours!

Wonderful news! You who are mourners. You are going to be comforted.

Wonderful news! You who are meek are going to inherit the earth

Wonderful news for people who hunger and thirst for God’s justice! You are going to be satisfied.

Wonderful news for the merciful! You’ll receive mercy yourselves.

Wonderful news! The pure in heart will see God.

Wonderful news for the peacemakers! You will be called God’s children

Wonderful news for people who are persecuted because of God’s way. The kingdom of heaven belongs to you.

Wonderful news for you when people slander you and persecute you and say all kinds of wicked things about you falsely because of me! Celebrate and rejoice: there’s a great reward for you in heaven.

From what I read about Fursey, he knew that in the kingdom of God that what Jesus had taught was true. Not that this was a list of standards to be met, but that the followers of Jesus who were already humble, merciful, peacemakers, persecuted, could celebrate because they were in good shape.

We know that mourners aren't always comforted and that people who work for justice in our world often take their passion to the grave, so it's important to get the gospel message – of the upside down kingdom (or maybe the right way up of the kingdom of God).

Fursey, was a holy man, committed to preaching and teaching the gospel in a difficult world because he understood that this was the way of the Kingdom. The prayer we pray daily “*your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” is what Jesus taught his disciples. Oh how wonderful it would be if we could live in the kingdom of God in the here and now! And of course, we can, because of Jesus. It is God's intention that we live our lives in reality of the kingdom and share that possibility with others.

When we look at [Fursey's Lorica](#) we have insight into the way God's presence touched his life. His life was shaped by his encounters of the presence of God and the reality of hell in his out of body/ near death experiences. Where ever he went, Fursey had

- **The arms of God around his shoulders** – a fellow traveller.
- **The sign of Christ's cross on his forehead** – he knew he belonged to Jesus, he remembered that Jesus died for him, and his resurrection life.
- **The touch of the Holy Spirit upon his head** – the guidance, the creativity, the courage in his thinking.
- **The sound of the Holy Spirit in his ears** – whispering, come here, go there (just as the Spirit guided St Paul in his travels) saying “this is the way, walk in it” the encouraging voice of God.
- **The fragrance of the Holy Spirit in his nostrils** – (a strange way to put it) but there are a number of occasions in the scriptures where the fragrance of God is referred to (sometimes to do with anointing and anointing oil, sometimes to do with the prayers of the saints) As it is the work of the holy Spirit to anoint and to stir us in our prayer-life and obedience to Christ, I understand that for Fursey the Holy Spirit's presence on him and within him was like a fragrance he could tangibly smell.
- **The vision of heaven's company in my eyes** – seeing the world as God's kingdom; the work of the angels – heavenly messengers bringing good news to all who would receive. Jesus taught his disciples that he only did what he saw his Father doing, he worked where his Father was at work. The vision of heaven's company – allowing Fursey to see God's promises and intentions for the place he was in and people he encountered.
- **The conversation of heaven's company on my lips** – hearing the conversation of Father Son and Holy Spirit and being given the authority to speak it out.
- **The work of God's church in my hands** – healing, caring, compassion but also the responsibility of establishing churches – communities that would replicate the life of discipleship that Fursey showed in his life.
- **The service of God and the neighbour in his feet** – the willingness to serve people (with generosity of spirit and extravagance of love) that meant for Fursey his life of pilgrimage (seeking to follow God in love and obedience).
- **A home for God in his heart** – where God came first – always; where the criticism of the church in Ephesus (in Rev 2) could not be applied: he did not forsake his first love of God. It was his desire to put God first that took him away on retreat in the first place (to avoid the dangers of being popular); the visions that God gave him were to motivate him for the rest of his life (just as Paul's experiences motivated him to share the gospel around the Mediterranean world).
- **And to God, the Father of all, his entire being.** Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.

As pilgrims in the steps of Fursey, with Jesus as our example and the sharing of God's Kingdom as our aim, the words of our first reading (1 John 4: 16b-21) will encourage us:

God is love and whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way love is made complete among us so that we will have the confidence on the day of judgement because in the world we are like him.

There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.

We love because HE first loved us.

If anyone says "I love God" yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Fursey challenges us in the quality of our living:

- How we love God
- How we love our fellow travellers
- The time we give to God
- and the time we give to serving other

Fursey knew he owed everything to the love of God. Do we?

Revd Rosie Bunn
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