

**St Fursey Service & Pilgrimage 2019**  
**Address given by the Revd Suzie Ellis**  
**Readings: 2 Corinthians 4:1-12 and Luke 12:32-37**

*'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom'*. These would have been encouraging words for a pilgrim, monk and visionary like Fursey who came here (possibly at the request of King Sigbert to convert his kingdom to Christianity?). If so, it would be fully in line with Fursey's own heart, for after his first great vision of angels, demons and fires of judgment, he'd been filled with a fervent desire to win souls for Christ and His Kingdom!

*'Do not be afraid, little flock'*. You see God uses the small! And Fursey followed the Celtic way which also valued the small. It cherished the solitary life of prayer, simplicity and praise of God in tune with creation and its natural rhythms. And around such a one a few others might gather and so organically grow a monastery! Yet Fursey was not to remain for ever in one place: after his great vision and commitment to preach, he became a pilgrim for love of God, and left Ireland for ever. Along with his two brothers and a few others, they travelled wherever they felt led, until around the year 631, they arrived here in E Anglia.

*'Your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom'*. And Fursey was soon known for his powerful preaching and holy life: so he and his little flock, were greatly blessed and fruitful here. Sigbert granted them land for a permanent settlement, so Fursey and companions built his monastery on the site of a disused fortress, which is traditionally thought to be Burgh Castle; and working around the same time as St Felix, they together won East Anglia for Christ.

*'Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning'*, adds Jesus in Luke's gospel. Visionary and pilgrim as Fursey was, he was first and foremost a monk, formed in living by a Rule, probably that of St Columbanus (which emphasised penance and harsh ascetic discipline!). But it was this that made Fursey: for, like the apostle Paul, his chief aim too was to serve, to labour day and night to pray and preach the faith so others might come to know the light of Christ for themselves. His too was a life of willing acceptance of all the hardships and difficulties he met so he might bring glory to God. And Fursey always remained ready and willing to follow God's on-going call to wherever and whatever came next. So, in the year 644 (after approximately 13 years here), Fursey left East Anglia for France, and began another great and fruitful work there. And there, 5 or 6 years later he died.

But: knowing about Fursey, or even making a pilgrimage in his name, is not enough! As Christians we're called to a 'transformational' faith to be changed 'from one degree of glory to another', to become like Christ. And the life of Fursey shows us what a life fully dedicated to God can look like, and what God can do through' it. We are also all called to a purpose, and are invited, for the love of God to follow wherever our own way leads, faithfully living out that calling within our own circumstances, so that our hearts and minds can be reconfigured. This is spiritual formation and it only comes by living it!: and by constantly offering ourselves anew to God's love and service!

***'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom'***, it's also a word of encouragement for us on our journey. Do you feel small and unimportant in today's busy world? Take heart, God's uses small! We may not live as solitaries, or spend long hours in prayer! But take heart: God sees our limitations and our desires, and He is with us and will greatly bless all we genuinely do for Him. We're not all visionaries, preachers, or in monastic orders, but each of us has God-given gifts, which He wants us to use in blessing others. NB each of our act, however small, if done for the love of God, will grow and multiply, doing 'much more than we could ask or imagine'. For in working for God's Kingdom, God is also pleased to open it up to you, .. and to me!

Finally: ***'Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning'***. It's also our call: to be ready for the next thing that God, or others, asks of us. Not always easy! To do it, means us being deeply embedded in the spiritual life .. in our own inner walk with God. Fursey, lived a life completely immersed in and based on regular, even constant, prayer, so his life stayed true and open to God. We're also to seek out our own discipline/pattern of prayer so to live open to God's presence and action within us. (Remember that good spiritual directors are worth seeking out for all who are serious about God!). The true pilgrims of Fursey are those who live for the love of God; and whose hearts are filled with the light of His glory shining in the face of Christ: the light and presence that works to transform us into the very likeness of Christ .. that we might share in the Kingdom.

*So glory to him whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine;  
glory to Him from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever  
Amen.*

*(Malling Abbey Office Book: The closing acclamation from Lauds)*

Revd Suzie Ellis  
5th October 2019

The Revd Suzie, following her retirement from full-time parish ministry, is currently working as an Assistant Minister at St Andrew's Gorleston in the Diocese of Norwich. Initially a college lecturer (mainly in English), she came to East Anglia in 1989, and with her husband served as Joint Warden at Quiet Waters Christian Retreat House in Bungay until 1997. Ordained as priest in the same year, she served almost 20 years within the Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich (the last 10 years as rector of three parishes) before retiring to Gorleston. She has been an Oblate of the Anglican Benedictine Community at Malling Abbey in Kent since 2008.