

The Benefice of Stoke-by-Nayland, with Leavenheath and Polstead and Nayland with Wissington (Wiston)

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The wilderness is really a place of life – 2nd Sunday of Advent

At some point in each of our lives, and probably multiple points throughout our lives, we know ourselves to be displaced people.

We often consider displaced people to be those who have been affected by war, persecution, or natural disasters. They are the ones forced to leave their homes. Whether they are the refugees of a war or the victims of a cyclone or flooding their lives have been uprooted. But there is also a displacement that can occur within us. Displacement can be more than a change in location or the loss of our physical home. I am talking about the inner geography of our lives and the displacement that happens within us.

Have you ever felt out of place, or that you just were not in a good place, or that your life had been somehow become uprooted? Then you have experienced some form of displacement and you probably understand what I am talking about. If you have ever felt disconnected in your marriage, family, or other relationship? Then that too is displacement. Have you ever felt that your beliefs, values, or world view just no longer fit or sustained you? Have you felt homeless even though you had a home? Have you ever felt as if you did not belong or fit in? If your life has ever been uprooted and left you feeling like you occupy space but are not really grounded then you know what it is to be a displaced person. Maybe you always looking for the next thing that will fix your life and live with the illusion that as soon as 'this' happens or 'that' changes then all will be well? That frantic searching might be a sign of displacement.

The award-winning poet Mary Oliver writes in her poem 'When Death Comes' that "I don't want to end up simply having visited this world". I think I understand what she is talking about and I suspect you may do too. We do not want to simply live a just passing through kind of life. We want to be "placed" people. So let me ask you this. In what ways are you living as a displaced person? What parts of your life feel uprooted and disconnected? What is your displacement?

"Comfort, O comfort my people," are God's words to displaced people. Isaiah first spoke those words to people exiled in Babylon, people whose lives had been uprooted. Those same words come to the displaced people of God today. We long to hear those words of comfort. We want to find our place. More than anything displaced people want to become a placed people.

But if you listen to John the Baptist in today's gospel then the way home, the way of becoming a placed people, is always through the wilderness. There is no way around the wilderness. You cannot get out of it. You can only go through it. The season of Advent reminds us of that every year on this Sunday and the next. And if it seems strange that displaced people are given two Sundays of wilderness and John the Baptist then maybe we have misunderstood them both.

Too often we have an image of the wilderness as empty, barren, and desolate; a place of demons and temptations; a place where the best you can hope for is to survive. But what if we have got it wrong? What if the wilderness is really a place of life, a place of hope, a place of connectedness, a place of finding ourselves and our place?

In Mark's account of the gospel the wilderness is so much more than a testing ground for God's people or a place of exile. Yes, the spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism and, yes, he faces temptation. But the wilderness is also the place where the angels waited on him. It seems that where there are temptations there are also ministering angels. Mark reminds us that Jesus often went to the wilderness by

himself to pray, to encounter the Father. The wilderness then is a place of connection to the sacred. It is also a place of rest. Remember that Jesus took his disciples to that quiet desolate place to rest? And it is in the wilderness that Jesus feeds the multitudes not just once but twice; the first time 500 people, the second time 4000 people.

So if we think that the wilderness is this place of emptiness and barrenness, a place bereft of life, growth, and hope, a place of hunger and abandonment then we have misunderstood and forgotten that it is a place of prayer, a place of rest, a place of feeding, a place where angels minister to us.

The wilderness is the place where we begin to become placed people, residents and connected. Isn't that what we want? I do. I want that for you, for me, for the world. I want us to have a sense of depth and rootedness, a sense of connection to ourselves and one another. I think that is what people of Jerusalem and the whole Judean countryside understood. That is what they heard in John's cry, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

They leave the city, and they leave their homes in the countryside and they go to the wilderness. They too are a displaced people. They leave because they are already living displaced lives in the city and the countryside. Their movement to the wilderness was not the cause of their displacement but the symptom of it. Something about John's voice, something about his message, something about the wilderness, said to them, "There is more for you than you have now. There is a place for you. But you will only find it in the wilderness."

Every movement to the wilderness, that place of where the angels minister to us, that place of prayer, that place of rest, that place of feeding, is an act of repentance. And if we have misunderstood the wilderness then we have probably also misunderstood John the Baptist and the repentance to which he calls us. We mistakenly hear John's call for repentance as a legalistic, moralistic, behaviour based, 'turn or burn' kind of repentance. But I do not think that is what John is saying or asking of us. Instead, what if John's call for repentance is the movement from being displaced to being placed, a move from occupying a space to taking up residence, a move from being a visitor to becoming a resident, a move from being ungrounded to one rooted in depth. And who among us today does not need or want that? Who among us is not looking for our place of belonging, a sense of connectedness and wholeness, a way of life that is authentic and holy? That is the work of the one who is more powerful.

The wilderness always holds that promise and if there is anything displaced people need well it is that promise. Because we live with the illusion and fear that whoever or whatever has displaced and uprooted us is the most powerful thing in our life, but John says, "No, no. That is not true. Enter into the wilderness and you will find the one who is more powerful."

Mark

Of your kindness and charity, please pray for all those who have recently died and for the families who mourn their loss, including from within our own benefice:

- Audrey Robinson (*Nayland – 8th December 2020 at 11am in St James', Nayland*)
- Ruby Warren (*Polstead – 16th December 2020 at 11.30am in St Mary's, Polstead*)
- Frances Norton (*Nayland – 17th December 2020 at 2pm in Colchester Crematorium*)

Please pray for our loved ones wherever they may be. For all working in Hospitality and Retail. For those worried about finances, job security or the future. We give thanks for friendships, fellowship and those who offer a listening ear when we need it most.

Congratulations to **Christopher Boyce and Melanie Lawson** who having had to postpone their wedding four times because of COVID restrictions were finally able to marry in St Matthew's Church in Leavenheath on Friday 4th December. We pray that wait was utterly worth it and that they will enjoy a lifetime of happiness together.

Christmas Helping Hand 2020



Thank you to everyone who has already supported Revd Mark's Christmas "Helping Hand" appeal to help the most vulnerable in our community have a more enjoyable and comfortable Christmas. If you are in the fortunate position to help, perhaps you receive a winter fuel payment that you do not really need, if so, why not pass it on to someone who does? Or perhaps you are scaling back your own Christmas Celebrations this year, if so perhaps you might consider giving some of the money you will save to help an individual or family have a really good Christmas this year?

You can do so online using the following Link: <https://gf.me/u/y8j58i>

Alternatively, if you would prefer you can post a cash donation in a sealed envelope through the letterbox at the Vicarage (please mark your envelope "Christmas Helping Hand")

TIS THE SEASON OF GIVING

HOLIDAY FOOD DRIVE



The Community Pantry, which is based at St James Vicarage, Bear Street, Nayland CO6 4LA continues to be well used. By their very nature, some items are used more frequently than others and there are times when we do run very low on some items. If you are already doing our "Reverse Advent Calendar" it would be particularly helpful if you were able to include some extra items from the list below:

- UHT Milk (*not Skimmed*)
- Instant Coffee & Tea Bags
- Toilet Rolls & Toothpaste
- Laundry Detergent "Pods"
- Packets of Microwave Rice
- Instant &/or Pot Noodles
- Jars of Cheesy/Tomato Pasta Sauces
- Jars of Cooking Sauces (Chinese/Curry/Mexican)
- Packets of Rice
- Tins of Stews & Mince
- Tins of Curry
- Tins of Chili con Carne
- Cup-a-soups
- Loaves of Bread
- Tins or Packets of Custard
- Boxes of Mince Pies
- Fresh Eggs are always a bonus!

Thanks to gift from a parishioner, we now have sufficient Christmas Crackers & Christmas Puddings

Alternatively, if you would prefer to support financially, then you can post a cash donation in a sealed envelope through the letterbox at the Vicarage (please mark your envelope "Community Pantry")



DETAILS OF SERVICES IN CHURCH AND ONLINE ARE BEGINNING TO BE MADE AVAILABLE AT:

www.naylandchurches.wordpress.com/christmas

You can also access online services from The Church of England, download the free #ComfortAndJoy App where you can hear again the message of the angels - good news of God's unfailing love for a world that is weary and hurting at:

www.churchofengland.org/ComfortAndJoy



Sunday 13th December at 9am – National Online Christingle Service

The Children's Society warmly invite you to join them for their first ever National Online Christingle Service. This will be streamed on the Church of England's website, Facebook and YouTube channels and it would be great if you tuned in to share the light with the whole country.

The service will include a few words from HRH The Duchess of Gloucester, the Archbishop of Canterbury who will be lighting the Advent Candle, as well as the Children's Societies Vice-Chair of Trustees, the Bishop of Derby Libby Lane. There will also be a special performance from soprano Joanna Forest, and of course the opportunity to join young people lighting the Christingles. It is set to be a magical event.



Doorstep Carols

Wednesday 16th December 2020 at 6pm

In conjunction with BBC Radio Suffolk, why not join in with neighbours and friends and sing Christmas Carols safely from your own doorstep!

You can download a carol sheet (and for the musically talented sheet music as well!) from www.doorstepcarols.co.uk and then simply tune in to BBC Radio Suffolk who will be broadcasting the carols for everyone to sing along to.

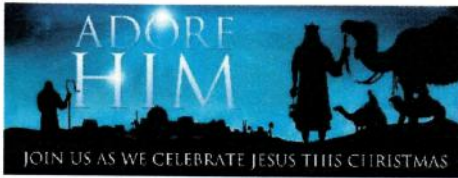


Christmas Eve - 24th December 2020 at 11.30pm **Midnight Mass (The First Eucharist of Christmas)** **St James' Church, Nayland and Online**

Christmas begins with our Midnight Mass Service.

This year we will have both an Online Service and a small in person service in St James. Due to current COVID guidance numbers at the service in St James' will be strictly limited, and sadly there can be no congregational singing.

Our online service will be available to all and will include the traditional Christmas Carols for you to join in with, safely from your own homes. All our online services will be available on the Benefice Facebook Page, YouTube Page, with links from our Benefice website.



Christmas Day - 25th December 2020 at 11am
Holy Communion
St Mary's Church, Stoke-by-Nayland and Online

Christmas continues with our Celebratory Christmas Day Service.

This year we will have both an Online Service and a small in person service in St Mary's. Due to current COVID guidance numbers at the service in St Mary's will be strictly limited, and sadly there can be no congregational singing.

Our online service will of course be available to everyone, and because you can do so safely from your own homes, we are able to include some traditional Christmas Carols to get you into that festive mood. All our online services will be available on the Benefice Facebook Page, YouTube Page, with links from the benefice website.

Has the impact of Coronavirus left you worrying about your bills, your job or your home?

There are people that can help.
Call us free on **0800 068 3131**

 Suffolk Collective

 suffolk Resilience

The Suffolk Advice and Support Line is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday



Home, But Not Alone
Supporting vulnerable people in Suffolk

The Home, But Not Alone free phoneline is for people who need **urgent** help and support during the Coronavirus pandemic. It is only for people who do not have support available from friends, family or neighbours and are struggling for food, medicines or other essential supplies.

Coronavirus Emergency Phonenumber

 **0800 876 6926**

9am-5pm every day
For all other enquiries please visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/homebutnotalone



COLLECT

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and
wickedness
we are grievously hindered
in running the race that is set before
us,
your bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our
Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for
ever.

FIRST READING Isaiah 40:1-11

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God. Speak tenderly to
Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has
served her term, that her penalty is
paid, that she has received from the
Lord's hand double for all her sins.
A voice cries out: "In the wilderness
prepare the way of the LORD, make
straight in the desert a highway for
our God. Every valley shall be lifted
up, and every mountain and hill be
made low; the uneven ground shall
become level, and the rough places
a plain. Then the glory of the LORD
shall be revealed, and all people shall
see it together, for the mouth of the
LORD has spoken." A voice says, "Cry
out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All
people are grass, their constancy is
like the flower of the field. The grass
withered, the flower faded, when the
breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass. The grass
withered, the flower faded; but the word
of our God will stand for ever. Get you
up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald
of good tidings; lift up your voice
with strength, O Jerusalem, herald
of good tidings, lift it up, do not
fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here
is your God!" See, the Lord GOD
comes with might, and his arm rules
for him; his reward is with him, and his
recompense before him. He will feed
his flock like a shepherd; he will gather

the lambs in his arms, and carry them
in his bosom, and gently lead the
mother sheep.

PSALM Psalm 85:1-2. 8-13 (or 85:8-13)

R Show us your mercy, O Lord.

Lord, you were gracious to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
You forgave the offence of your
people
and covered all their sins. **R**

I will listen to what the Lord God will
say,
for he shall speak peace to his people
and to the faithful,
that they turn not again to folly.
Truly, his salvation is near to those
who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land. **R**

Mercy and truth are met together,
righteousness and peace have kissed
each other;
Truth shall spring up from the earth
and righteousness look down from
heaven. **R**

The Lord will indeed give all that is
good,
and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness shall go before him
and direct his steps in the way. **R**

SECOND READING

2 Peter 3:8-15a

A reading from the second letter of Peter.

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,
that with the Lord one day is like
a thousand years, and a thousand
years are like one day. The Lord is
not slow about his promise, as some
think of slowness, but is patient with
you, not wanting any to perish, but all
to come to repentance. But the day
of the Lord will come like a thief, and
then the heavens will pass away with
a loud noise, and the elements will be
dissolved with fire, and the earth and
everything that is done on it will be
disclosed. Since all these things are
to be dissolved in this way, what sort
of persons ought you to be in leading
lives of holiness and godliness,

waiting for and hastening the coming
of the day of God, because of which
the heavens will be set ablaze and
dissolved, and the elements will melt
with fire? But, in accordance with his
promise, we wait for new heavens
and a new earth, where righteousness
is at home. Therefore, beloved, while
you are waiting for these things, strive
to be found by him at peace, without
spot or blemish; and regard the
patience of our Lord as salvation.

GOSPEL Mark 1:1-8

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

The beginning of the good news of
Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is
written in the prophet Isaiah, "See,
I am sending my messenger ahead
of you, who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the
wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the
Lord, make his paths straight,'" John
the baptizer appeared in the
wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of
repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
And people from the whole Judean
countryside and all the people of
Jerusalem were going out to him,
and were baptized by him in the river
Jordan, confessing their sins. Now
John was clothed with camel's hair,
with a leather belt around his waist,
and he ate locusts and wild honey.
He proclaimed, "The one who is more
powerful than I is coming after me;
I am not worthy to stoop down and
untie the thong of his sandals. I have
baptized you with water; but he will
baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

POST COMMUNION

Father in heaven,
who sent your Son to redeem the
world
and will send him again to be our
judge:
give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first
coming
that, when he comes again,
we may be ready to greet him
with joyful love and firm faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



Show us your mer-cy, O Lord.