

DROUGHT SEMINAR

The following is part of a seminar held near the end of the drought for a group of clergy people.

- 1, Theological positions
- 2, How does a church minister to the district in drought?
- 5, The future.

1. THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS

The first question the church must grapple with is the issue of theology & drought. For our theological stand point will determine how we respond to the community. Some Christians would say that God sends droughts & other natural disasters because of the sin of the people in the area. By bringing a drought God is looking for the people to repent & a turn back to God.

While at the other end of the theological spectrum you have those who believe it is just a natural thing & has little to do with God. I want to get you to do some work by breaking into groups & building a case for Gods sends the drought or droughts just happen.

Some key Scriptures

God sent the drought

Duet 11:17 Gods anger will shut up the heavens
 1 Kg 8:35 God shuts up the heavens to teach the people
 2 chronicles 6:26
 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 When God shuts up the heavens humbly pray & repent
 Joel 1:13-14 lament & repent
 Jer 17:7-8 - God will bless people that trust him
 Ps 107: 33-35 - He turns the fruitful land into barrenness
 1Kg 16:29 Ch 17:18 - Drought broke when sin over turned
 Is 24 - Lords devastation of the earth
 2 Ch 7:13 - If my people will turn from their wicked ways then I will heal their land
 Hagg 1:9 I called for a drought upon the land
 Preach repentance.

Droughts are a natural happening

Matt 5:44-45 - God is impartial
 Job 25:2 - India vast natural disasters, Nature
 - God has the sovereign right to act as he feels
 Gen 2 - God gave dominion over the earth so humans are responsible for their own errors - global warming.
 Gen 3 the Fall & entrance of sin - Humans will experience the consequences of sin.
 - God brings good out of bad e.g. Children of drought stricken farmers given holidays.
 - Being a Christian does not Guarantee a problem free life in this world.
 Gods character - if you make God vindictive you cast aspersions on Gods character, God gave us free will he does not then say I will come in the back door by sending bad things that will make you cry out to me.
 - The book of Job

For myself I believe droughts come about because we live within a fallen world. There are strong indications that the collective sin of the world in the form of not caring for creation has lead to the heating of the atmosphere which has a large impact on El Nino. Therefore God has not sent the drought but has allowed it to happen. Given that we are in a drought, I would want to help people see & understand that God can be found & can journey

with us through a drought. While we pray for rain we must also pray that God will give us the wisdom of how to farm until the drought breaks.

2 HOW DOES A CHURCH MINISTER TO THE DISTRICT IN DROUGHT.

A) Recognition of the scale of the problem by all.

With this drought we had plenty of warning from the meteorological people. The farmers of the district heard the warnings & heeded them. Stock was sold early & Feed budgets adjusted. So the first step in the community is due recognition of the problem by the farmers, the weather & farm advisers & the church. With this recognition there must be level headed education & publicity so farmers and the community can take early action..

b) The church response

The church must ask the question how are we as the Christian community going to interact with the wider community facing a drought? The Awatere Christian joint venture has sought to do this in a variety of ways .

1. The first way was by holding a drought service in a paddock We invited people from town to come out & stand with the farmers. We had a tremendous response, in all we had 6 denominations represented. The Salvation Army came complete with band. In the service we had a farmer, a wife/ mother & a child speak about what the drought meant to them. We identified not only the bad points of a drought but also the positives. Like families having more time together over Christmas. Our prayers were for rain & for wisdom. We took from the service symbols of the drought, dried dam mud, chewed tussock & a small dead pine tree & placed them in the church. They will remain there until the drought breaks even though some now complain how ugly these are..

In the days running up to this service the media caught on to the concept & we found ourselves doing interviews. In these interviews we sought to be positive. The news media had been beating the drums of gloom, sensationalising the effect of the drought. So we highlighted the way the farmers were doing a great job farming, they had acted early & animal health was not being compromised as the difficult decisions were being faced. It was important to relay to NZ the real feelings of the farmers - they were not looking for handouts, they just wanted people to care & to be helped to do what they know best - farm.

1. The main human factor is stress. Stress for the farmer as they make hard & difficult decisions. Stress for the family as they seek to cope & stress for the community at large which will suffer from the down stream effects of this (casual workers, community groups, schools, local shops etc). The church has run seminars on stress management, written articles for the local news paper & produced a leaflet which was distributed widely in the district. *(Have copies available).*
2. Light relief drought dance was organised by the church for the community just to let their hair down & celebrate community.
3. We have attended & offered help at community drought activities. Farmers drought recovery meetings, Ednas' day out etc.
4. We co-ordinated a time out camp for families that was funded by church from Blenheim.
5. The church has received gifts from other churches. Some gifts to help us with our budget & some to help people in the district. One Church even sent fruit cakes to give to those stressed, it was tremendous to see how they were received.
6. We have networked with other organisations & seek to help them in their activities.
7. Ongoing Pastoral care of the community. Realising that due to the nature of farming the male works as an individual & often when faced with a problem like a drought they shut the farm gate & go into their shell. Farmers are traditionally bad communicators. As such we need to find ways of visiting when they are more likely let their guard down, when they are more willing to talk. What can church offer? There

is little we can do. But we can actively listen & seek to feel their pain. Having gone to all the farmers meeting & listened, often we can pass on the information we gathered there.

3, Ministry opportunities in the future

The paddocks have a short green tinge to them at present & those from Christchurch urban dwellers that drive through the district on their way to their sounds play ground may think the drought is finished but the reality both in terms of rain & financially is that it has not even begun to finish. The green can be best described as a spray paint or as some one commented the other day we are now in a green drought. The effects of this drought will be long term.

What can the church do as we prepare for the next drought that will surely come one day?

- God is saying look to me not to assets of physical
- Don't treat possessions as our God as many secular people do
- Look for the HS working in Christian and non Christian people.
- God has given us all we process - the farm is important, but God is more important. God is God.
- The church is challenged to teach farmers to look at their problems from a Christian perspective
- soaking the district in prayer is vital
- Christians need to get along side and show compassion
- Recognise the changing face of the district.

- The challenge for the church is to regain the central focus of the community. By showing empathy, compassion, love, hope, time, providing social services - child care- youth work - rugby coaching
- being practical
- Make church facilities available for community use
- Every member ministry vital
- Help people to be smarter - field days

- Teach people matt 24 Ez 3
- Financial planing
- Teach biblical principals
- Discern outside pressure sources
- Focus on what we can do
- Learn to share as Christian communities

- Show faith as acts of service
- Initiate community get togethers, dances, diners, socials, sports
- Work hard at restoring hope in the church

The challenge for the rural church as it faces the future is to continue finding meaningful ways of speaking into peoples lives as they experience rural life. Both in times of celebrations and in times of stress. For the church to be Christ's body at work building the Kingdom of God in the paddock that God has lead us to.

A copy of a service held in a field during a devastating drought. When I went to design this service I first looked for a service in a book on the web that I could adapt but found nothing. Though I had some very useful conversations with other Rural Ministers. It is my hope this copy of our service will help others who Minister and walk with people through drought.

SERVICE HELD IN THE AWATERE DURING 1998-99 DROUGHT

Welcome

Hello my name is Rev Martin Harrison & it is a thrill to welcome you all this afternoon to this paddock in the Awatere as we gather to share together the common journey that we find ourselves on as we travel through the Marlborough drought of 97 - 98. We come to share, support & encourage each other. I thank all those that have travelled long distances both those that have travelled unsealed roads & those that have come from Blenheim & further afar.

Many have sent their greetings. From as far away as Opotiki & Geraldine I have received messages of support from Christians. Bishop Derek of the Nelson Anglican Diocese also sends his & the Dioceses greetings. There are many people who can not be physically here today that stand with us. It is as we gather together to reflect on our humanity, to pray & talk we find new strength for the journey we are on.

Lets pray

As we gather together as a community drawn together by our common journey through this drought we pray to the living God, the God of love & infinite mercy, creator of all that has life. We come to you as people in need, in a time of crisis for the earth, & yet touched by the hope & newness of life we have found in you Amen

The recognition of our humanity & that we do not have to stand alone.

As we gather we ask that God will guide us in the journey ahead of us. Lets sing
Song Guide me o though great Redeemer

We are in the midst of a drought that effects many people. Starting at the farm it continues on to the support industries such as the farm labours, shearers & on into the towns & the service industry. The drought is no respecter of the boundaries that we draw on our maps & it has spread beyond the Awatere into the rest of Marlborough & further afield.

I'm going to invite Andrew Barker to come & talk about the reality of the drought for the farmer.. After this Rev Miriam Taylor will read a collection of writings from the local school children and then Rose Stevenson who is a wife, mother & a farmer will come & talk.

People telling their stories which also helped to educate the townies.

A representative of a male of the district

The drought in Marlborough began back in Autumn. The Met Office warned of the El Nino effect - but would they be correct? They are almost always wrong. But if not, how bad will it be? Every farmer reacts differently. The end result - a mental & financial battle for survival. Cropping farmers have suffered dramatically with little or no income. When will it end - how much will it cost? This is a big challenge for us all - farmers, contractors, everyone. Whilst we want it to rain, West Coasters want it to stop, & you know, there is always someone worse off than yourself. Coping with the drought is made easier by all the help from caring people - the Federated Farmers' drought office, the businesses, cakes from Geraldine, food via Red Cross, offers of holiday homes, friends & family, church support, donated hay - it is all very humbling. The burnt grass, the dry stock water dams - yes the dams - there was a farmer in the Awatere who went to rescue a stuck sheep out of the muddy edges & he fell face first into the oozy mud. Four hours later when rescued, the mud pack effect had made his facial skin soft like a baby's bottom & taken 10 years of his looks. He has started a new business called "Wrinkle out",

selling containers of his mud to wealthy Asians wishing to regain their youth. No one told him, they have a kind of drought of their own.

Children's writing read by an adult

While we adults are preoccupied with feeding out, filling tanks, freighting stock, our children are watching and listening and absorbing what is going on around them. Parents who had young children during 1982 drought have told me that they have been surprised by the things that those children, now adults in their late 20's, have remembered from that time. We should never underestimate the perceptiveness and sensitivity of children. Some of this can be in the following writings from Seddon Primary School children.

1) The drought has arrived; no feed, no rain. The wind keeps blowing. The hills are bare. The trees are dying. The wind keeps blowing. It is sad to look around, It is hard to look around; to see hungry sheep, empty dams, no water. The wind keeps blowing. The drought is here to stay. The wind keeps blowing. All the people are trying to be bright and cheerful during the drought of the century.

2) The earth is de-hydrated and the people are devastated that the garden trees are wilting and dead, that animal are thirsty and crying out in distress for shade. The farmers talk among themselves "This is the El Nino weather pattern for you" .Across the sunburnt neighbourhood friends and family are desperate for water. The ground is parched and bare.The grass a motley colour of green and brown. "Will this drought ever end? "

3) The people of Marlborough are in drought It's very dry, there is no doubt. Rivers are dry, as well as the creeks Water in the ground, well there's been no leaks. Farmers are praying hoping for rain wishing the fields were green again Livestock are crying in distress wishing that someone would stop this mess. The army is helping, so is the train bringing us water as a substitute for rain. This weather, I hope, might soon be gone At least I wish it would just cool down.

4) When the drought comes it comes to stay It never seems to go away. Farmers struggling to feed live stock No water to drink comes as a shock. Grass is drying and crops are dying. No money coming in has fainters sighing. Water restrictions all around Hardly any water for the plants or the ground. Not a drop of rain from the sky. Farms going under makes you cry.Rivers and dams dry up Essential it is to save every cup.

5).Paddocks are dry, brown and crisp Sheep are hot, thirsty and stunted. Trees are shrivelling up from all this scorching heat. Birds fly in the cool of the evening to dodge the extreme blazing heat of the day. Kids hide inside for the same reason Yes the firey heat and the gusting wind. So today's the day I hope and pray that today's the day - it rains.

A representative of women in the district

The drought has certainly been one of the talking points of the summer. Between this & the terrible case of the missing friends in the sounds, Marlborough has been in the media a great deal lately. In some cases the publicity has only added to peoples stress. Even small children are aware that the Awatere is in the midst of if it's driest years ever. However we are very lucky in that we know it will rain again ONE day, whereas it is unlikely that the Hope & Smart families will see Olivia & Ben again. This puts our drought in perspective. Fortunately for me, John tends to have an even temperament - stress has not been to evident in our house hold this summer. But signs of stress are outwardly visible - his family aren't blessed with his smiles as much & his voice doesn't sing as often. For 10 year old James & 7 year old Emma, the drought has meant they have seen more of their father that usual over the summer, & they have been able to spend many hours in the swimming pool. But even they realise the consequences - no money to spare, no water to waste, & endless, long, hot dry dusty days. 1 year old Laura is the some age now as her father was during Marlborough last Big drought of 1957/58. John doesn't remember anything about those years so no doubt this season is having little effect upon Laura either, other than that she too is able to become a real fish in the pool. She has never seen an umbrella used for anything other than to

keep the sun off. It was a year of firsts for our farm. We made no hay or silage & sold our first store lambs ever. For a month or so our road was like a heavy traffic by-pass with stock going out & feed coming in, & it still hasn't stopped. Now the hay & the grain have arrived, the daily chore of feeding it to the sheep has begun. It's as if all the sheep are pets - they've never been so keen to see the tractor come into the paddock. The dogs have become almost obsolete too - the sheep will follow the tractor anywhere in search of food. There is no doubt that drought causes stress. This can either draw communities & families together, or pull them apart., so tolerance & understanding in relationships is more important than ever. Laughter is still the best medicine, & communication is vital. In our marriage we promised to take the good times with the bad. Let us hope that this year is the worst we'll have to cope with. Although the statement "another day in paradise" beginning to have a hollow ring about it, we must appreciate that we do still live in a beautiful valley, with Tapi dominating the landscape. We must remember to be thankful for what we do have, & to look forward to when this beautiful valley will recover from this drought.

Martin

When we look around at the vastness of the country in the Awatere, in a spiritual sense it indicates that God is all around us all the time & how in no way & in no fashion can we escape the presence of the father, Son & the HS. There is a sense of being a mere dot out in this vast landscape. As farmers we spend our lives exposed to the reality that we work & manage the given rather than dictating it As we look to God who is the only one that can bring the rain lets sing "These Hills", a NZ written hymn in which the tune is named Kaikoura.

(An approach & acknowledgement of God)

Song These Hills

Many years ago there was a shepherd who knew what it was like to come up against hard times. He knew what it was like to be out amongst his sheep in the middle of a storm as well as a drought. He knew what it was like to have to search out feed for his flock. Admittedly his flock was a lot smaller than the average size mob here in the Marlborough & his feed budgets would look tiny compared to the ones that each farmer here has been grappling with.

This Shepard wrote about his feelings as he faced the troubles of farming life. His writing have been quoted many times & are much loved. It has brought comfort to many when they have faced trouble. The shepherds name is David the author of the 23rd Psalm in the bible. David identifies God as the great shepherd, the one that he chooses to follow & to be owned by. That when his life faces trial & pain that His shepherd God will deliver him out of his distress.

In the same way as during this drought farmers care for their animals, juggling precious resources of water & feed, so David paints the picture of our God who cares for us..If we allow God into our lives, God will journey through the drought with us & will answer our cries for rain. So assured that God answers our cries another writer called Habakkuk wrote, "Though the fig-tree does not bud & there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails & the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen & no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights."

Crop failure & death of animals would devastate his land. But Habakkuk affirmed even in trying times of loss & hardship that he would rejoice in his God. He did not allow his feelings to be controlled by the events around him. Instead he bases his hope on his faith in God who would give him strength.

These two characters in the Bible we can identify with because they were people of the land. People who faced the same variations in the seasons as we do & the trails this presents us. As we consider what their response is

let us draw strength & hope from the God that they found to be so faithful. Let us call on god to help us in our journey. *(Sermon offering hope)*

Songs The Lords my shepherd

The following read by Catholic so we included the other church represented in the district.

The people of God have a human face. We laugh, we weep, we wait in hope. We lift our eyes, & stub our toes, we love, & struggle, we fail we stand & always we stand on trembling ground. But God is God & Jesus is the Christ & the Spirit will lift up our feet. God is in the centre, God is at our endings. Nothing lies beyond the love of God in Christ. Let us come before God & pray.

MARTIN Prayer

Of course we want to pray , God of course we want to be your people of faith But we turn away , for many reasons. We are silent in our fear, our weakness, our doubt & we find it hard to believe in the constancy of your grace. We share with you now, some of the things which stop us praying.

(voice or voices Miriam & Peter)

M not knowing who to pray to

P embarrassment

M un sure that it will do anything,

P Time

M I don't know how to.

(This section was designed as confession)

MARTIN Take from us , God all the things that separate us from you. Lord hear our prayer.

song What a friend we have in Jesus.

MIRIAM

Let us pray Living creator God as we eagerly await the refreshing & renewing rain we acknowledge you are the Creator of the universe. We thank-you that you continuously reveal yourself to us through your creation that surrounds us. As we work the land through the cycle of the seasons we are often are tempted to be proud of what we achieve. But now in the grips of El Nino & the drought that it has brought to our district & to others further afield we are humbled by the realization that there are so many things we can not control. So we come before you now asking that you help us through this part of life's journey. We bring before you the parched areas of our lives. Areas that have dried up through disappointment, bitterness, a sense of failure, through physical exhaustion or despair. Breathe new life into us all as we pray. We thank you for the community that surrounds us & supports us. Help each of us to be bearers of your love & hope as we travel life's journey together. We thank-you for those who have gone before us ... for their foresight & hard work in establishing water schemes & dams. May we learn from this drought so that we can leave a heritage that will help those who follow after us. We thank-you for the plentiful harvests that are a result of the dry- the salt, the cherries & the grapes. Living God give us the stamina that we need as we journey through this time. As we face difficult decisions grant us the wisdom to make the right choices. We are aware of the need for regrowth before the cooler winter season so in faith we pray that rain will fall gently & revive the parched earth, As you send rain & the land is restored may we remember how you provided for us through the generosity of others ... in providing us with water & stock feed & organisational expertise. May we in turn be channels of your love & share our plenty with others who are in need. Give us faith to live each day trusting in your great mercy & provision. All these things we ask in the name of your son & our saviour Jesus Christ Amen.

In our district, the Flaxbourne, Kekerengu, Ure & the Awatere rivers flow, forming a constant reminder of the way that God can flow through our lives, lets stand & sing Down the mountain. During the Hymn a collection will be taken up this is primary for the members of the Awatere Christian Joint Venture but if you would like to support the work of the church in this area you are most welcome.

Song Down the mountain

MARTIN

Lets pray God of all life, you help us see that the farming way of life is less about lifestyle & security & more about worshipping you & showing your love in community as we support each other. Take this collection & use it & us to bring new life into peoples lives. In the name of Jesus we pray Amen.

As we end you may have noticed the dead tree & the chewed tusk plant that are up on the deck of the truck. These are symbols of the drought. As a people we are taking these back into the church where they will remain until the drought breaks as a reminder that we live in a hurting community. A community that is on a journey which is not easy & often trying but one that with the Lords help & the help of each other we will get through. A locals comment to me recently was Don't let the drought get to you Don't let it get you down. With the Lords help & with each other we won't. As we move into the picnic lets sing our final song expressing our desire as we go.

Song Go out

ENDING

Go in peace & faith. If you are tired, may you find rest. If you are anxious, may you find peace. If you are lonely, may you find friends As we journey through this drought together may we find new life & know that nothing can separate you from the love of & grace God in Christ Jesus. Amen

A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE WRITTEN AFTER IT RAINEDWet & Dry

It has been a long time since my young sons have had the fun of jumping and splashing in puddles. Over the last few weeks there has been great joy as hope has been restored by the substantial rain fall we have experienced. It means we can move on into the recovery phase of the drought. It is true we still have to cope with the financial effects and the rebuilding of the stock numbers but now the rain has come we know we have passed half way. As we do we think of the many people throughout New Zealand who have stood with us. From the many Blenheim people who came and stood in our bare paddock at the drought service, to the many people through out New Zealand who have given gifts of time and talents (some people in the deep south even sent fruit cakes). By these actions we have known that we are not alone and this knowledge has helped us as we as a district have wrestled through the drought.

The rain has come in the quantity that we so desperately needed and now we look to the spring with hope. As we do we are mindful that our joy over the rain is not mirrored by others. We read of the home owners whose houses have been damaged by water and mud. With concern we think of the pastures that are flooded and the stock that have been lost. Rain to them has not brought hope and a smile.

There is a famous story about a man who was travelling when he was beaten up by some thugs and left dying in the gutter. While he was lying there different people went by, the first two went quickly by not wanting to get involved. After all, what had this man's situation got to do with them. Perhaps they were thinking of the many pressing things that they had to do in their own lives. While the third man even though he was under no obligation, stopped, putting himself out by helping in what ever way he could. The challenge of the story is to do likewise. (Luke 11:30-37)

As we rejoice at the rain and the ending of the physical drought, the challenge is to remember those who have listened to this story and learned from the last mans actions. Because their efforts, though they might have seemed small, helped us when we were hurting. The challenge is for us to go and do likewise. May we not forget this as we join the children in their laughter as they splash through the puddles.

Rev Martin Harrison

This was a leaflet put together and distributed through schools and a local news paper with the aim of educating and helping people

STRESS

In a drought one of the worst things is the stress. Here are some positive actions that you can take so you don't unravel.

LOOK AFTER THE BODY

EXERCISE Energetic exercise for 20 minutes every other day releases stress, improves the immune system, builds up endorphins (the body's natural pain killers), reduces the risk of depression & heart disease.

DRINK WATER: A couple of litres a day supplies our bodies with calcium, iron, & other minerals as well as washing the impurities out of our system.

USE YOUR SENSES Look! listen! touch! smell! enjoy! Taking pleasure in things around us builds up a sense of affirmation

LOOK AFTER YOUR MIND

PRIORITISE. Make lists of things to do in order of importance & give yourself the satisfaction of ticking them off as they are completed. Set goals that are achievable.

USE CHOICE Choice is a most powerful de-stressing tool. Even in the most severely restricted situation it is possible to find something of choice. We can choose how we breathe, the tone of voice we use, whether we tackle a task in a way that is constructive or defeatist, Acknowledging the range of choices open to us, & taking responsibility for the one we choose, is the bottom line of all stress management. The consequence of making our own choice is that we can no longer blame another for what happens.

LOOK AFTER THE EMOTIONS

LAUGHTER IS GREAT THERAPY. 'A happy heart is like good medicine, but a broken spirit drains your strength.' - A Biblical proverb. Laughter... good belly laughter!... helps us keep in shape. Laughter has the ability to change our expectations, our attitude.

LET IT OUT - DON'T BOTTLE IT UP Unexpressed feelings of frustration, anger, guilt, bitterness failure, disappointment, can lead to illness & worse an eruption that can have disastrous results. It is important to share our feelings with those we can trust. In this way we can support each other. We are dependent on each other. Studies have shown that group support promotes good cheer, confidence, competence, creativity, hardiness, & the ability to re tune stress for the good of all.

LOOK AFTER THE SPIRIT

LET GO - LET GOD! God has an 0800 free line! We can always tell God exactly how we are feeling. He will 'never let us down. When we come to him in complete honesty he has promised to uphold & strengthen us & accompany us through life's trials. God said, "I upheld you since you were conceived & have carried you since your birth, Even to your old age & grey hairs. I have made you & I will carry you; I will, sustain you & I will rescue you." (Isaiah 46)

God will help us if we let him.

BE STILL - REFUEL! As well as speaking to God we need to allow him to speak to us. We often don't stop still long enough to allow him to come into our lives & energise, encourage & direct us. A way of allowing him to speak to

us is by reading his handbook for life - The Bible. It is full of techniques for relieving stress & it shows us Jesus - the stress Manager par excellence! Learning from him will change our lives.

DROUGHT BREAKING SERVICE

When the drought broke this is the celebration we had.

Welcome

What a pleasure to welcome you this morning as we gather in celebration. It is now 7 months since we gathered in a paddock on the Boyce's farm. We gathered in an expression of our common journey as we travelled through the Marlborough drought of 97 - 98. In that service and in the months that followed we have sought to share, support and encourage each other. And so today we gather in public celebration that the drought has come to an end and in thanks giving to God, and to share our hope we have as new life in the form of grass growth, lambs and calves appear around the district.. So as we come before God let us celebrate.

Song Come on and celebrate.

We come today to celebrate because the rivers that run through our districts have returned to their normal flow. So lets sing a song that talks about the rivers of God.

Song Down the mountain

As we travelled to church this morning each of us journeyed through the country side that we love so much. A landscape that is marked by it's valleys and hills. It is in this creation that we often capture glimpses of God and it helps us to understand that in a spiritual sense God is all around us all the time. That there is no way and in no fashion can we escape the presence of the father, Son and the HS. As farmers we spend our lives working with creation. We manage the given rather than dictating and are mindful that we are very small in comparison. In that knowledge we called out to God for rain and wisdom on how to farm in the conditions we faced, for we knew that God was the only one that could answer our needs. As we think of the land we farm lets sing these hills, a NZ written hymn in which the tune is named Kaikoura.

Song These Hills

There is no denying that the drought for us has been hard, even devastating. Even now as the rain falls we know that the effects of the drought will be with us for some time yet. If we are to honest, we have to admit that during these hard times we have wanted to be people of faith, to be a people of God who when faced with hard things in life, lift their voices to God but...

To often we find that despite our desire we lift our eyes, we stub our toes, we love and struggle and find it very hard to be a people of faith. Our fears, our weakness, our doubts often make it hard to believe and trust in God. Yet you are the God that calls us into an open and honest relationship with you and so we find the courage to voice how we have felt and ask that you Forgive us Lord. Take from us the things that separate us from you and guide us in our walk in the future. Lord hear our prayer

Lets sing a song which identifies the privilege we have, that we can talk honestly with God and God hears and responds.

Song What a friend we have in Jesus.

As we think of our experience of the drought lets say the prayer on the OHP together
Perseverance OHP

When difficulties face us,
Help us, Lord, to keep following.
When temptations distract us,
Help us, Lord, to keep following.
When failures discourage us,
Help us, Lord, to keep following.
When tragedy makes us doubt,
Help us, Lord, to keep following.
When opposition makes us fearful,
Help us, Lord, to keep following.
When tiredness makes us feel like giving up,
Help us, Lord, to keep following.
Until we reach the perfect joy of heaven,
Help us, Lord, to keep following. Amen

Help us to put you at the beginning, the centre and the end of our lives. To rely on you in all situations.

As our relationship with God grows sometimes it is hard to imagine what it would be like without God. This next song talks about the reality of Gods presence and the response it provokes.

Song Father God I wonder

As the song identifies our response to Gods presence in our life draws us into praise. I wonder if I could have 6 children up the front to help me.

Readings Balloons

Praise that goes with a bang

Distribute six balloons to members of the congregation and invite them to stand at the front. The balloons bear letters which together make up the word PRAISE, and inside each is a piece of paper bearing the words of a Bible verse about praising God, placed there before the balloon was inflated. One at a time, invite the six to burst their balloons and read out the verse: suggested verses are

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, Psalm 92:1-2;

O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, Psalm 95:1-3,

Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples. Psalm 96:2-3,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble 2 Corinthians 1:3,

Be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:11,
 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3.

Sermon

As I identified earlier it has now been 7 months since we meet in the paddock. During this service Miriam led us in prayer. In her prayer she brought before God all those whose lives were becoming dry through disappointment, by bitterness, by a sense of failure, and by physical exhaustion and despair. She asked God to breathe life into each one of us and those who shared a similar journey.

Since then I have seen this happen as the community has worked as a real community. As people have taken a healthy interest in the welfare of others by listening to one another and seeking to help in many different ways, from helping feed out, to passing on information of where help can be found.

Therefore I truly believe that God has answered that part of the prayer. For what I have observed is a community breathing new life into each other as they demonstrated the command of Christ to love our neighbours. .

In the prayer Miriam carried on to ask God to help us face the difficult decisions. Asking that we might have the information and the wisdom to make the right choices. As I think of this part of the prayer I think of the many field days, the discussion groups and the informal passing of information over the fence that has happened over the months. This has helped the district as a whole to farm through a drought in a way that every one can be proud. There has been no evidence of animal neglect which the sensation hungry media craved for, because the farmers farmed with great wisdom and skill.

Miriam also asked God that we would find stamina as we waited for the rain that we so desperately needed. She led us in faith to pray that the rain would fall gently and revive the parched earth and ease our concerns before the weather got too cold for the grass to grow.

After that service we got a bit of a rain, but it was nowhere near a drought breaking rain. The weeks went by and then the months began to slip by and it would have been easy to forget what we prayed for. Could it be that God did not hear our prayer or even care?

When the rain came I was out at Kiwi ranch out in the sounds. The rain gauge there was broken but it was not hard to guess this was a good rain. On ringing home our guesses were confirmed.

As we came into Picton we were told to get in our cars quickly and go because the roads were in danger of being closed due to flooding. Sure enough as we came through the Omaka swamp the water was lapping the road, the Wairau was in full flood. Blenheim was water logged. As we drove up and over the pass I wondered how the Awatere was faring. To my surprise there wasn't even large puddles in the paddocks, the ford over the

back of the vicarage was bone dry yet we had had 5 inches of rain. It was a good rain but it seemingly had come to late and we would not see any benefit until spring. But that's a funny thing instead of being cold since it's been rather mild, so mild that there has been grass growth. We have experienced the warmest July ever.

To day as we celebrate the end of the drought and the beginning of lambing, we are in a far better shape than we could have dared dreamed. One farmer I was speaking to the other day described it as being perfect for lambing. Many of us were tempted to think it was to late, but our experience in the last month has shown us it is never to late for God. So as we look into the future with a renewed sense of hope and celebrate Gods provision for us, let us remember and pray again the words Miriam's used to end the prayers that day.

Let us pray

Help us as you send the rain and the land is restored to remember how you provided during our times of our need through the generosity of so many. With the provision of Water and stock feed and organisation. May we in time, when our hay sheds fill, be channels of your love as we share our plentiful with others that are in need. Give us faith to take each day at a time planning wisely, yet trusting ultimately in the providence of your seasonal rhythm of nature. All these things we ask in the name of your son and our saviour Jesus Christ Amen.

Removal of symbols

Many visitors have come into the church in Seddon and wondered why we have this old dried up Christmas tree at the front of the church. And what's more what is the chewed tusk and the dried mud all about. 7 Months ago we took from the drought service these symbols of the drought and placed them in the church as a reminder of our hurting community. We made the bold statement that they would remain there until the drought finished. In that time we have often wished we had not made such a statement! What a mess it created, it looked ugly and got in the way. But it helped us remember that the drought was creating a mess, making the district look ugly and forcing people to live and work in a way they did not want to. The Good news is that it is now time for them to be removed as we see the breaking of the drought and the returning of the green and the evidence of new life in the form of pasture growth, lambs and calves. I wonder if the children would come up the front and help us to carry these things out of the church.

While we take the things out musicians play
come on celebrate

We return into the church with symbols of new life , a lamb, a branch of blossoms, spring flowers etc...

As we look at these symbols of new life and the hope they point towards lets respond to God by saying together

OHP

With your whole created universe,

we praise you for your gift of life.
 We thank you God our Creator
 that you fill our life with the colour and beauty.
 God, you are forever making things new,
 in nature and also in our relationships
 through the light and life of Jesus resurrection.
 So with all creation,
 joyfully we praise you and say :
 Holy, holy, holy Lord.
 God of mercy , giver of life;
 earth and sea and sky and all that lives,
 shouts your presence and your glory

Song Our God is an awesome God

None of us live this life in isolation, instead we do it in the company of others. We share our happiness with each other and it becomes greater. We share our troubles with each other and they become smaller. We share one another's griefs and burdens and their weight becomes possible to bear. May we always remember to give and never grow too proud to receive. For in giving and receiving we learn to love and be loved: we encounter the meaning of life and the mystery of existence and discover God alive in our community. As we look into the future in the hope we find as we see the new life and the growth let us express our desire of the way in which we want to march into the future by singing our last and offertory hymn
 Song We are marching in the love of God.

Lets pray

God of all life, you help us see that the farming way of life is less about lifestyle and security and more about worshipping you and showing your love in community as we support each other. Take this collection and use it and us to bring new life into peoples lives In the name of Jesus we pray Amen.

May this land in all it's diversity it people their trails their hopes be for us all the very dwelling place of God and may the blessing of God the Father, the son and the HS be with you all and all whom you love this day and ever more. Amen.

Showing Christ's love by giving a fruit cake

In the middle of the drought I received a phone call from a Church some 500km away. The call was to let me know that in a day or two a courier would drop off 20 fruit cakes to be given to farmers in need. The cakes arrived and we had a tremendous few days distributing them and saying these are from concerned Christians. I saw tears in more than one eye as the farmers encountered Christ's love in a very practical way. We have since sent fruit cakes off to a several rural communities that are under ethier stress from drought or flood. Let the peace of Christ pass via a fruit cake.