

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.