

## 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.