

Celebrating Harvest

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[0 : 00] I was thinking today, what shall I start off with? And I thought I would treat, maybe particularly for the ladies, a bit of Michael Buble. And when I'm returning from so far away She give me some sweet loving, brightening up my day Yes, it makes me righteous, it makes me feel whole And it makes me mellow, down to my soul She gives me love, love, love, love, crazy love She gives me love, love, love, love, crazy love She gives me love, love, love, love, crazy love I need love, love, love, love for me Crazy love, crazy love

You're okay. Michael Blueberry sings about crazy love. And you came and maybe good friends brought you today and you thought, well, you're expecting me to talk about farmers.

You're expecting me to talk about fruit and maybe talk about tractors. Well, I'm certainly going to talk about farmers. I'm certainly going to talk about fruit. Probably not so much the tractors.

But this, this morning, is very much about, as we've heard, a story about love. This, this morning, we've heard in our reading, is a story about love.

You see, if you were living in one of the villages down on the Somerset Levels, you would be going to a harvest home. Now, I don't know whether you've ever been to a harvest home. They're quite boozy affairs.

[1 : 58] But people celebrate. And do they celebrate this idea of bringing the harvest home? It's bringing it in. It's the fruit of their labors and the fruit of what they have seen God doing, bringing it in.

And they celebrate. And maybe that is what we need to do more and more. They, we just couldn't think today about tractors because it's far more than that.

Today, we often skirt around the real reason why we're here. And the core reason is about this sowing, reaping, but also harvesting and keeping, which is so important.

And in our Bible story this morning, it is about love because there's something to celebrate. It's a crazy love.

A real crazy love. Because love is crazy. It often is. And it's crazy in the way in which God gives it. Let's put this into the context of the narrative.

[3 : 03] But first of all, I have a little surprise for you. Michelle, would you like to dip your hand in the bag and bring out a heart?

And would you, your mic's on. Maybe you'd like to read what's in the car for people. For God so loved the world that he gave his only one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Okay. That's the word. Thank you. Just going to leave that there so everybody can see it, which is great. God so loved the world.

And it's crazy, isn't it? Because if we look at the backstory to what happened here, Jesus has already come into Jerusalem. Everybody has lined the streets. Everybody's been excited to see him.

They've been impassioned by what he's going to come and bring. Yet Jesus knows that in a few days' time, the people are going to turn against him. It is not going to be a happy story of love of them for him.

[4 : 09] But he came to bring love and hope for a whole people and for us. This crazy love that we're going to see. And so we get this story.

And so the law keepers and the Pharisees and everybody else that had gathered, they're all plotting against him because this message that he's bringing isn't the message that they've been handing out to people.

It's all about the law. It's all about keeping in order. It's all about self-sufficiency and their preference. And that's what it's all been about. It hasn't been about crazy love.

And so this crazy love that we see in this story, and Jesus tells this story within their hearing because he needs to tell them, because about this crazy love.

There was once a wealthy farmer. He owned a lot of land. He had this vineyard. He was specialising in growing the most perfect and most beautiful grapes.

[5 : 11] It was high-end. He'd invested everything in this thing. And the farmyard had invested heavily because it was for sharing.

It wasn't just for a few. It was for so many. And he was determined, the farmer, that this wasn't going to be to just keep for themselves. This was to share.

And after many years of hard work and investing, he took a huge risk. And he put in place some hired hands to invest and to look after the vineyard for him.

When it was harvest time, he sent a few of his harvesters to come along and help harvest it because he knew that it was going to be a huge harvest. He knew there was going to be so much for everybody.

But things had turned sour. You see, the farmhands suddenly got illusions of grandeur. And suddenly, they believed that they should be the farmer, that they should own the vineyard, that it was somehow theirs.

[6 : 14] And when the servants arrived, the farmhands grabbed the first servant and they beat him up. The second one came along, they murdered that one.

And the third one, I think he had a bit of sense. He went back and he told the father, the farmer, exactly what was happening. The farmer then sends more servants towards, and they still have the same violence, they still have the same contempt.

The farmhands showed pure, pure contempt for the farmer. I guess if you were like me, the farmer is at the end of his tether.

What shall I do? What would you and I do in that situation? But here it is. He loves the vineyard so much, the farmer, but he also still loves the farmhands.

He wants things to change. So he thinks, surely, what I'll do is I'll send my son, because they'll listen to my son, surely.

[7 : 24] Because in those days, if you sent your son, your son had the same authority as you did. So that's exactly what he did. He sent the son. When the farmhands saw the son arriving, they rubbed their hands together.

They plotted, they schemed, and they said, this is the farmer's one and only son. If we kill him, the vineyard will be ours, and it'll be all of ours, and we will inherit it.

Do you know what? That is so bizarre. How would you think that you could destroy this love? But that's exactly what they did.

They killed the son. And they just wouldn't listen. It was just bizarre. At the end of this story, we're confronted with a picture of God.

A God who has crazy love. Crazy love. Because this story, depending on how we answer.

[8 : 38] Because Jesus said, Jesus answers, what will the farmer do? That's what he asks the people that are listening. That's what he listens to. That's what he speaks to the Pharisees.

What will the father do? And that for each of us is a big question, because I don't know what you would do. Because there would be something bubbling up in me about anger and retribution.

wanting to get that back, maybe by force. But this is crazy love. This is crazy love of the father.

And this is what the crazy love is all about. And this straightforward story today is an allegory, because we know that the farmer is this, is our God.

And the farm hands, the human race, God's people. And the people sent on the farmer's behalf, the servants, are the prophets.

[9 : 34] Did they listen to them? No, they didn't. And then, the farmer's son, you've guessed it, it's all about Jesus. Jesus is the son that was sent.

Jesus is telling them this story, prophetically, of what actually was going to happen. And they were plotting and scheming already. So let's begin with the farm hands.

Let's look at this. It's crazy. Think about it. Why on earth do the farm hands think that they're going to inherit the vineyard? You know, they haven't made a very good job of it.

It's only the father that makes a really good job of it. Maybe you're thinking as well, you know, if we think that the vineyard is ours, this world, we think about global warming, we think about hunger, we think about starvation, we think how we haven't shared the fruits of the earth.

We haven't made a really good job of it. It's no wonder that the father wants to come back and actually help and advise and guide. Then, of course, there is the people in there, the farm hands.

[10:46] You know, maybe it's legally possible that they could own the vineyard. No, not at all. Not at all. This is the father's vineyard. It is beautiful.

He wants to produce more and more and more to share, not just for us, but to share with people. So why keep it to ourselves? Why are they so stuck? And so often we feel, don't we, oh, this is for us. No, it's not for us. This is for everybody. So we need to be open. Then there's the servants that came, the servants, the prophets, and they were quite a few who tried to tell people about this crazy love of God.

And it is crazy. And maybe we feel that out in the world today, that people just don't understand where we come from. Because we're talking about a love that people just don't experience because they want this for themselves.

And then, finally, is the son. That God loved the world so much that he sent his only son. Because he knew that that was the answer.

[11:55] That is crazy love. Crazy love. But we need to get it. You see, the farmer wanted everyone to taste and see that he is good.

And without that, there would have just been a few. Just a few who wanted to keep it to themselves. And it's no surprise that we handed out fruit because that's what we need to be doing more and more.

Handing it away. Handing it away. That's what the father wanted. Give it away. Give it away. Give it away. Share it. Because the good thing that we have to share is so good. No wonder he was so crazy, the farmer and the father, for making sure that this came about, that the vineyard produced enough for everybody.

And it does if we allow it. But think about it. He sends the servants, they're beaten, stoned and killed. But the crazy thing is then he sends more. He sends more, then he sends the son.

And the beautiful thing is for the hope for today is that actually God puts all things together for good.

[13:11] And I was thinking really about we're sowing and reaping and keeping. Let's just pour this back in the bag. Just a little bit that will go in there.

And shake it all up. Because God's goodness in this story is just so crazy that actually what he does is he actually says, no, I am in charge.

I love you so much. It is so crazy that I really want you to get the message. You can kill my son, but of course we have the resurrection. And Jesus rose and died again.

so we can have this crazy love. Because for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Now, it's crazy love. You see, this crazy farmer maybe isn't so crazy. Because if you love people, you will know what ends you go to.

[14:26] To share and to save. Sacrificially. And that's what we're called to do in this story. The farmer acts more like a desperate parent. More and more to reach out to the lost children that he wants to gather.

It's crazy, the kind of crazy love that comes, as Michael Buble says, of being in love. Because it's a love story. This isn't just about harvest and service.

This is a pure love story like most of the Bible. And if you're opening the Bible for the first time, if you're looking, if you're dipping your toe in, this is about love.

What will the farmer do when he comes back? All the listening Pharisees are asked that question. Jesus turns it around and says to them, what will the farmer do when he comes back?

And all the listening Pharisees, all they can do is they can imagine violence, retribution, guilt, punishment, and sin. No.

[15:27] This is crazy love. So Jesus asked them this question. And the farmhands, the Pharisees say, they say to him, he will put those wretches to a miserable death.

You see, the Pharisees condemn themselves. That's part of Matthew's narrative. They condemn themselves when in Christ's loving character, if we love, there is no condemnation.

If in Christ we know the farmer, there is no condemnation. so easily, like you, I could become a farmhand.

It's so easy to accumulate and to think this is ours. But I pray this morning that we look outside of that because love is a matter, is never a matter of meeting halfway.

it's going the extra mile. And the crazy love of this farmer, the crazy love of God that we see this morning goes the extra mile. And when love is truly the motivator, the extra mile is well worth it.

[16 : 38] And he goes, he doesn't give up. So, God like the farmer, it says, your love is the anchor. We've sung that. So, most of us would agree that we need more of that crazy love in our world.

And how are we going to do that? This story introduces us to be like God because God is love.

God's love is crazy in reaching those who we know who needs this love.

We've heard about the food bank today. We've heard about Andrew House. We've heard about the people. We know the people. Maybe some of you are gathered here who need God's crazy love.

And it's there in all abundance.

God will never give up on seeking to reach you. Seeking to reach those he longs to reach. And that is the mission of his church.

The mission of his church. Jesus came, rose again, the mission changed. We are called to reach a people with God's crazy love.

[17 : 46] And that's why we say that the kingdom is near because love so amazing, so divine, demands my all, my life, my soul, and everything.

How do you feel about the crazy love? Because it's there for each and every one of us. And that's why we welcome Jesus. One question, if God's love is crazy enough, then how can we say no to somebody who's so crazy who keeps saying yes?

How can we say no to somebody who is so crazy in love with us that keeps saying yes? Harvest is about welcoming.

And the question is today, do we welcome Jesus? Do we welcome him? Do we see them when he comes from far off coming to help us share what we have?

Do we welcome or do we say it's just for us? I pray that we would be really open with the harvest that we've been given. The harvest that we've been given, all that we've been given, all the great things that we've been given to share.