



Today we have entered into a time of storytelling all around the miracle that is family. Just as it was thousands of years ago, family can be a loaded term in our times today. Some of us are blessed with positive and grounding memories of families who loved us with beauty and some of us come from families where the memories are not the most beautiful.

Regardless of the families we were born into, we all face the choice as adults over who our families will be. For some that may be a simple choice of remaining within the structure we were born into. For some that may mean entering into a new and different sort of family that we choose to be a part of. For some of us, it is a combination of those families of origin and families of choice.

Regardless of how our families come to be, I do believe that our families all have the potential to be vessels of miracles and there is something sacred about the choices that are made within families. You just saw one miracle about how a man can become a father. I want to share with you another story about one of those family miracles from my life.

The summer that I was twenty-one years old, my mother sold both our family home in Northern Michigan and most of the belongings that were in it. My father had died a few years previously and my mother decided that she was going to go to law school. That summer she was moving to Pittsburgh to start her new life as a law student.

I wasn't there the day that the house was packed up and the crowds came to sort through and buy all of the things that I had grown up with and had surrounded my childhood. I chose to run, hiding from the pain of seeing that piece of my life taken apart. What disappeared into the world on that day were the things that accumulate from years of raising a family of eight children, some broken, some still useful and some oddly precious. This is a story about one of those oddly precious things.....

On the corner of the mantel in our living room was a Christmas music box. The odd thing about this Christmas music box was that it remained on our mantel all year long, not just taken out when we put up all of the Christmas decorations every December. The music box was a very 70s rendition of Mary holding baby Jesus, and Joseph and an angel singing. If you rotated the base, it played Silent Night. I remember my mom calling it simply, the 'Holy Family' music box.

In the deepest recesses of my memories, I recall some childhood incident that may have involved throwing things that shouldn't be thrown inside, a crash and that incredible glue from the 70s that could stick anything back together being applied to the broken angel of the music box. I remember that crack on the angel being just as much a constant throughout my childhood as the music box was on our living room mantel.

This is a picture of my family taken some Christmas season long ago. If you look in the upper right hand of the picture, you can see the music box. Well and me on the left sitting on my brother's lap wearing some very 70s clothes!

The day our home was sold, the Holy Family music box disappeared. Life and time moved on, my mom finished law school and went on to be a very successful lawyer for the second half of her life. I found myself across the country in Seattle and over the course of some close to thirty years, built a life that often leaves me breathless in its abundance and beauty.

A few years back, my family went to a potluck at the church we attended at the time, St. Paul's over in Ballard. One of the church members was downsizing and had brought in boxes of Christmas decorations to donate to anyone who wanted them. There was garland and wreaths and balls and some pretty freaky looking Santas.....and tucked among it all was a music box.

It was a very 70's version of Mary holding baby Jesus, surrounded by Joseph and an angel singing. I spotted it across the room, halfway covered with some old garland and walked over to look at it, a little bit breathless. When I turned the base of the music box, Silent Night played loud and clear. When I slowly turned the music box around, I saw a long crack across the angel's back.

That day we brought home that little Holy Family music box. Several months later, my mom came out for her summer visit with us. We got to talking about that little music box and my mother told me something that I did not know. She told me that she kept that music box out all year because she needed something to remind her about what she thought a family should really be like.

She told me that family, Mary and Joseph were the models she looked to for how she tried to raise her own family. That they were a model of a family that stepped up and stepped in not

because they had to but because they chose to. That they were a model of presence and sacrifice and love that defied logic. That's why the music box was a constant in our house. That's why it was never put away when Christmas was over. That little music box was the inspiration for my mother's gift of love in her children's life that was of stepping up and stepping in not because she had to but because she chose to. Love that was of presence and sacrifice and love that defied logic.

Was the music box I found in my prior church's basement with the cracked angel the same one that was on my living room mantel as a child? Could it really have traveled thousands of miles over the course of thirty years, across the country to end up being donated back to one of the children who was probably responsible for cracking that angel back in the very early seventies? Could life really move in that sort of miraculous way, forging a bridge through time across decades? If it did then that would surely be a miracle.

Or maybe the miracle was that a little music box prompted a discussion with my elderly mom about why she made the choices she did when she was parenting me and my siblings all of those years ago. Maybe the miracle was the sharing of wisdom from one generation of women to the next about the hopes and dreams for those we walk with in this world. Maybe the miracle was my mother's love all of these years, not because she had to but because she chose to. Love that was of presence and sacrifice and love that defied logic. That was a miracle in my life.

This season we talk a lot about miracles. This I know, miracles happen. Those miracles may be angels breaking down our door with a mystical message. Those miracles may be choosing to love and to be family not because we have to but because we choose to. Those miracles may be a reunion with something from our past that calls us into our future. Those miracles may be the way a song makes us feel alive and sacred. Those miracles may be the way traditions call us home to each other. Those miracles may be ancient stories that spark something deep within us that calls us into hope or peace or joy or love.

This season we talk a lot about miracles. This I know, miracles happen. Regardless of what they are and how they appear in our life, this I believe, miracles are God drawing near, calling us to choose love and in turn, calling us home. Praise be to the God of miracles. Amen