

July 5, Ordinary Time 14A (Genesis 24:34–38, 42–49, 58–67)

## **Doesn't God have better things to do than arrange marriages?**

by [Diane Roth](#) in the [June 17, 2020](#) issue

Last Christmas I got a card from Carmen and Ryan, a couple whose wedding I officiated over 20 years ago. It was a great surprise. I hadn't heard from them for many years. They were members of my first parish, or at least she was. It was a rural three-point parish where there were many more funerals than weddings. I think theirs was one of only three weddings I did in those four years. And when I saw their picture on the card, I realized that in my mind they had been frozen in time from the day of their wedding. I couldn't believe that I was seeing them so many years later, their children all grown up, still married.

I remembered also that for their wedding I preached about Rebekah meeting Eliezer at the well. I tried to make the point that as God was the matchmaker for Isaac and Rebekah, so God was also the matchmaker for Ryan and Carmen. And I had some anecdotal evidence as well: Carmen met Ryan through a mutual friend who lived in another state. They conducted a long-distance romance, and now Carmen—who had spent all of her life in rural South Dakota—was traveling to a state far away that she had only visited once. I thought she was very much like Rebekah.

God was their matchmaker, I said. Perhaps it was a cheeky thing to say. It was sort of risky, since we never know how things are going to turn out. We pledge and we vow and we look for evidence of divine interference, but we never know.

It also might seem that God has better things to do than arrange marriages. Rebekah and Isaac—well, perhaps in their case we can make an exception. They are part of the chosen family, through which divine blessing will come. It is easier to justify the meddling hand of God in their meeting, courtship, and marriage. After all, their marriage is not just about them—it was about all of Israel, and the salvation of the whole human race.

But for the most part, with a few exceptions, it might seem that God has better things to do than arrange marriages. We come together by happy accidents, and our relationships serve smaller purposes than Rebekah and Isaac's. God's finger is not on our relationships, pushing us together, working through our loves and squabbles for larger purposes than we know. God has better things to do.

Except that's not what the rabbis thought. In Ellen Frankel's commentary *The Five Books of Miriam*, I found this portion of a midrash:

Rabbi Yose bar Halafta was asked by a Roman matron: "You claim that your God created the world in six days. Then what has He been doing since then?"

"All this time the Holy One has been making matches."

"That is no great feat!" declared the matron. "I can do that just as well."

But Rabbi Yose warned her: "It is not as simple as you think. The Holy One, blessed be He, considers making matches as difficult as splitting the Red Sea."

It's an intriguing thought. What if all God does, every day, is make matches? What if that is, in fact, the only way that God transforms the world—through matchmaking, which is to say, through human relationships? Since creation, God has been arranging meetings, bringing people together—not just so that they will have a nice life, but for larger, mysterious purposes. For the flourishing of the world and the advancement of God's purposes.

In the Christian story, this matchmaking God was at work in the lives of Mary and Joseph, making a sure match that would provide a home for God's son. Through angelic visitations and dreams, God brought together two people perfectly right for each other and perfectly right for the world. That's not to say they had a rhapsodic existence, with no struggles and no raised voices. But through this match, the redemption of the world was accomplished.

That Christmas card I got from Carmen and Ryan reminded me of a powerful lesson: we are no different than Isaac and Rebekah, no different than Joseph and Mary. Our lives and our loves are holy, the holy product of a loving God. If we take God seriously as a matchmaker, it means that we each, in our own way, contribute to the

coming of God's reign. It is embodied in us and in our children, and in our children's children, to the thousandth generation.

And it means that we are matchmakers too, that it is our job to bring people together. Our main way of changing the world is through the relationships we create and nurture. The work of bringing people together is holy. First in families and then in churches we learn that we live not for ourselves but for one another.

It is the same when we are baptized and we receive God's name. It is a meeting at a well, and a match is made between God and us, for the sake of the world. Just like Carmen, just like Rebekah, we end up traveling to places we never thought we would go, for the sake of the love of God.