When I was a 9th grader my dad shared with the family one day that he would be attending Portland State in the fall to study computer science. To be honest, I didn’t even know what a computer was at the age of 15, so trying to share with my friends what my dad was studying was impossible.

I recall how quiet the dinner table got following his announcement. None of us sitting around the kitchen table really knew how this change would affect our lives on a daily basis, but there was a shared feeling that life was definitely going to be different. The first thing that happened was the announcement by my dad that I needed to get my driver’s license permit, since my mother didn’t drive, so my dad would be teaching me to drive on the weekends when he returned home from Portland State.

Thus began a rhythm of constant upset and change. None of us were prepared for a change of this magnitude, where my mom suddenly started working, I got my driver’s license on my 16th birthday, and became the chauffer for my mom and two sisters. Every Sunday night my dad would leave me with a list of things to do during the coming week. The change grew me up fast, and at the time I didn’t like changing from a child to an adult over night, but unlike my friends who could just be high school kids, I gradually found that exercising power taught me a lot. I learned how to adapt to change when not knowing all the answers to the different problems that popped up. Remember, there were no cell phones, only a shared neighborhood phone line, and long distant phone calls were only used for emergencies. Even a distance of 82 miles felt like you were on your own.

Three women, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah stand before each other as they weigh their options for the future. They are now widows. Two Moabite women and one Jewish woman, Naomi, ponder their choices, and it is Naomi the Jew who chooses to return to her home town of Bethlehem. Orpah makes the decision to move back in with her family of Moabite origin, but it is Ruth who decides to follow Naomi to Judah. Chapter 1 of Ruth sets the tone for all four chapters in the book of Ruth. The Message says, “Again they cried openly. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye; but Ruth embraced her and held on.” Naomi said, “Look, our sister-in-law is going back home to live with her own people and gods; go with her.” “But Ruth said, ‘Don’t force me to leave you; don’t make me go home. Where you go, I go, and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your god is my god.’”

There is little known about the Book of Ruth. We know that this book is located between Judges and I Samuel in the Christian bible, but in the Jewish tradition, the book of Ruth is a liturgical reading read in the synagogue during the Feast of the Weeks or what the Jews call Shavot, reaching as far back as the 8th Century B.C.E.

It’s written like a historical novel, meant to teach Jews how loyalty, love of family and generosity are character qualities that are important in the Jewish tradition. The storyline teaches us how tribalism was not only how people identified themselves, it was a matter of pride to belong to a strong group of people showing long generations of kinship. A person found their identity in knowing they came from a certain family, and Ruth steps away from that tradition when she follows Naomi to Judah. Her choice takes courage. What helps Ruth to embrace change during a difficult emotional time?

**Love** motivates Ruth to follow Naomi to Bethlehem; love of Naomi and love of the Israelite’s God. The relationship Ruth shares with Naomi is deep, and her love for this woman enables her to follow her. Life, for Ruth and for us, has a funny way of letting us know the direction in which we need to go and where we need to grow. We may feel unsettled about our choices to change, just like Naomi did by allowing Ruth to follow her to Bethlehem, but love is not just a feeling, love pushes us out of our comfort zone to embrace change, even when we feel like staying curled up inside our homes.

Death forces all three women to re-evaluate their lives. Naomi had lost her husband 10 years prior to her two sons dying and now she feels like she has no reason to remain in Moab. Being a widow in their culture was hard, unpredictable, and a woman had few ways to earn money for herself. Most often a widow had only one choice, return to their birth families. Naomi grieves deeply for her husband and now she has lost her two sons, so she decides to return to her family in Bethlehem, for she is so filled with grief she is bitter, saying to Orpah and Ruth, “it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.” While Naomi is returning home to her family, Ruth is the one who embraces change head-on. And, Ruth’s decision to follow Naomi into a foreign country requires the ability to be open for change to happen. Some quality or intuition instructed Ruth to follow her gut, and to do so, would require her to leave her life as she knew it behind. She would need to learn a new way of living and worshipping, and to do this would require a humble heart.

**Embracing humility** helps one lean into change, in spite of feeling insecure and afraid. Ruth would need to trust the advice of other people who may know more about her journey than she did when she made the decision to leave Moab. Ruth’s decision took courage and boldness, yet, as we will read further into Ruth next week, she leaves the country where she was born and becomes an immigrant.

St. Paul’s is undergoing change as I speak, because we are in the process of choosing a new rector for our church. Changing rectors can be unsettling, but we must trust the process. As I look back at our previous priests, I have come to one conclusion: Each priest brought a set of gifts with them. They have brought themselves, and their individual giftedness has prompted change to take place at St. Paul’s incrementally. Receiving a priest’s individual gifts requires a humility of staying open to change. It’s telling ourselves to remain curious as St. Paul’s embraces the idea of new leadership. And, ultimately, we all need to do one thing, we need to trust that God will be with us.

**Embrace God and each other**. In this beautiful story of love and change, our Old Testament reading says Ruth, “Clung to her,” meaning she clung to Naomi for the experience she held inside her. Ruth would always be a Moabite by birth, but she chooses to be adopted into a Jewish culture. Ruth chooses change, and she does this because of her love for Naomi and her relationship to the Jewish God. Ruth embraces God and a new life.

When Ruth made the decision to follow Naomi to Bethlehem, she had no idea what her future would be. Ruth probably thought she would be welcomed into the family of Naomi’s and she would blend in to the family unit over time. But God and Naomi had much more planned for Ruth to experience.

When my father chose to quit his management job and learn a new skill, he took a risk that things would work out. Life did change dramatically for my family as my father graduated from college and took a computer programing job in Salem, Oregon. My twin sister and I finished our senior year of high school living with friends in The Dalles. My younger sister moved with my parents to Salem, and without me realizing it at the time, the separation from my parents became final. Just as Ruth’s life changed forever when she left her birth country.

I’ve always enjoyed this story of Ruth and Naomi. Though only 4 chapters long, and locating the book in the bible can be difficult as you shuffle through the pages between Judges and I Samuel, the story has much to tell us. Mainly, that change is inevitable, and that the real story outcome depends on how we choose to deal with change.

Will we be motivated by love, as Ruth and our Gospel lesson instructs? Will we allow ourselves to be humble, as we feel the insecurity that comes from change? And will we embrace God and each other so change becomes possible. I believe this is what the story of Ruth is telling us. **Embrace love. Embrace humility. Embrace God and each other**. Amen.