

The Rev. Matt Gaventa, chaplain of Sweet Briar College
Opening Convocation invocation, Aug. 24, 2016

There are a great many stories in scripture about new beginnings in new places, but for my money, the most poignant is the story of Ruth and Naomi. Naomi has to leave home because of a famine; she and her husband move to a faraway land. There, in this strange new world, they raise a family, two sons who marry two local women, Ruth and Orpah. And then, of course, tragedy strikes: first, Naomi's husband dies, and then both of their sons, leaving her a widow of no fortune in a foreign land.

She turns for home. What's the point of staying in this strange place? At least at home she will be with her own tribe. Ruth and Orpah, whose prospects aren't much better, set out to make the journey with her, but Naomi won't have it. Naomi's tired of new places and new beginnings and new people and she just wants everybody to go to their corner. Orpah relents. But Ruth won't have it. Ruth clings to her side. Ruth makes a promise. Wherever you're going, I'm going. Wherever you come from, your people are now my people. Ruth says: as of now, we are in this thing together. Two women, cast aside, taking on the world.

We are in this thing together. And so I would invite you as you are comfortable to join your hearts with mine as we ask the blessing of the God who is in this thing with us every step of the way.

Creator of every journey,
You have been with us even from the very first day,
Through every bright morning and every tired evening,
And every anxious midnight stare into the dark.
You have brought us from the first day to this day,
And so we ask, this sacred afternoon, in this sacred space,
That you would stay by our side yet again.
That you would give your blessing on the sacred work we do together,
On the opening of this school year,
On the journeys of those who have come into this new strange land
And on the journeys of those who have come back again to this old familiar home.
Grant each of us, by your grace, the gifts worthy of these sacred days:

Gifts of imagination, and courage, and perseverance,
Gifts of honor, and valor, and dignity.
Gifts that seek justice
Gifts that love kindness
Gifts that challenge us, and ground us, and form us for the journey ahead.
God, we are in this thing together, by your grace. Amen.