Crossing Unchartered Waters - Don’t Let Fear Hold You Back

As the heat of the summer begins to fade, and we look forward to the cooler days of fall, many of us will be embarking on the start of a new school year. These new beginnings often produce anxiety of the unknown — uncharted waters. Nearly all of us have, at one time or another, experienced the feeling of nervous anticipation — not knowing what the future will bring.

In my 30 years of experience in the higher education environment, as student, professor, and now administrator, the start of every school year always evokes a very strong sense of anticipation. How will I do as a student? How will I do as a teacher? How will I do as an administrator?

This feeling of anticipation makes it difficult for both the mind and body to focus on the upcoming tasks at hand. For those in my generation, the Carly Simon song titled "Anticipation" made us stop and reflect. If you recall the lyrics, anticipation of the future causes the singer to wait in fear of what will occur next.

This universal emotion, anticipation of the future, is present at the start of each new phase of our lives. We are uncertain; therefore we can become fearful and find ourselves just waiting, as in Simon's song. In the context of the upcoming academic year, the students, parents, and even sometimes faculty and staff at CBU, frequently express feelings of nervous anticipation. As I greet our new and returning students and parents, or welcome the faculty and staff back to campus at Convocation, I draw upon my experiences to help them replace this sense of anticipation with a sense that they can succeed. I remind them that they are never alone and that through the support of those around them and God, they can thrive during the upcoming year.

In the recent Gospel reading from Matthew, in which Jesus walks on water in the presence of the apostles, I was struck by how anticipation caused even the apostles to wait. They had just witnessed the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand, and were on their boat without Jesus. As simple fishermen, I can only wonder what they were anticipating. What we learn is that they were frozen by fear of the unknown.

To quote the Gospel:

Briefly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

However, the apostles in anticipation of something else could only wait until Peter took his fateful walk to Jesus. When fear overtook Peter, what happened next?
Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Our everyday lives are filled with doubt, sometimes even fearing the worst. Perhaps, we are worrying about the wrong things. Matthew's gospel teaches us that the words — courage and faith — are what Jesus wants us to use to live our lives. We need to live our lives full of hope, knowing that Jesus will give us the courage and faith to succeed. And if we begin to struggle, like Peter who took the step onto the water and then lost courage and faith, Jesus will be there to catch us and bring us up when even those around us cannot help.

So the moral of this story is that Jesus encourages us to live life with confidence. If anticipation makes us wait too long, we will be late for the life that God wished for us to live.

Simon sings:

_We can never know about the days to come_  
_But we think about them anyway_  
_And I wonder if I'm really with you now_  
_Or just chasing after some finer day._  
_Anticipation, Anticipation_  
_Is making me late_  
_Is keeping me waiting_

But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Don't let anticipation make you late for all that life has to offer!