

ANTICIPATION (Inspired by the Carly Simon Song)

Week #4 of a 7-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, May 18, 2025

LYRICS to "Anticipation"

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

And I tell you how easy it feels to be with you

And how right your arms feel around me

But I, I rehearsed those words just late last night

When I was thinking about how right tonight might be

Anticipation

Anticipation is making me late

Is keeping me waiting

And tomorrow we might not be together

I'm no prophet, Lord, I don't know nature's ways

So I'll try, see into your eyes right now

And stay right here 'cause these are the good old days

These are the good old days

And stay right here 'cause these are the good old days

These are the good old days

These are the good old days

These are the good old days

These are the good old days

MESSAGE

So, how many people have ever felt anxious waiting for something important? Like, to hear back from a company after your job interview? Or waiting for the test results for the medical test results? Or waiting for him to phone after your first date, like he promised he would? [Congregants laugh] How many people ever had that? You felt anxious waiting for something?

And how many people would say you worry and currently have something you're really worrying a lot about? Anybody have any worries? How many people worry so much that, if you have nothing to worry about, you worry about having nothing to worry about? [Congregants laugh]

So why is it that we have a hard time waiting? You know, why is it that we get so anxious and nervous and worried about the things in our lives? And I'd say, without a doubt, the reason we get anxious and worried is because we all have a fear of the unknown. You know, we don't like the unknown. Uncertainty makes us uncomfortable, but sometimes it scares us and terrifies us and even overwhelms us. Because ultimately every one of us wants to be safe, and every one of us wants to be in control.

We all have ways that we manifest the desire to be safe and to be in control.

The first one is that we want to know everything. We need to know everything. We have to know everything! How is it going to turn out? When is the answer going to come? We want to know!

The second one is a love of routine, familiarity, and predictability. We want to know that everything is where it should be all the time, because we don't like when things are unpredictable.

The third one is excessive reassurance. Is everything going to be okay? Texting, *"Is it going to be all right; is it all right?"* Or having someone say to us, *"Everything's going to be okay; everything's going to be okay."*

And then the last one is that, to feel control and safe, we like to hold on. You know, sometimes we get attached to things ... not just things, but the way of thinking and believing in the way life should be.

You know, the unknown and uncertainty makes us feel out of control; makes us feel like we're not safe; makes us feel afraid. So, we turn to things like being anxious, nervous; worrying; running; resisting as our response.

You know, they did several studies about the impact of uncertainty. And they did the study where they had two groups, and both had electrodes on them, and they were both getting shocks. The one group got shocks 100% of the time. Every time they were certain and they knew they were getting shocked. The other group got shocked 50% of the time -- half the amount of shocks -- and yet they felt more stress because of that moment of unpredictability and uncertainty. When the other group was getting shocked every single time, they had less stress, because it was certain. The other one was variable; you know, that unpredictability got them to feel greater levels of stress.

This morning, we're going to talk and have a closer look at our relationship with the unknown and uncertainty, and how to better deal with it.

Think about your relationship with uncertainty and the unknown. Is it a good relationship? Is it a not-so-good relationship? Are you not on talking terms with the unknown and uncertainty? [Congregants laugh]

How many people would say that you could do a better job in dealing with the unknown and uncertainty in your life? So what if I told you that uncertainty is not something to fear or hate or resist? In fact, uncertainty is good! Uncertainty is important! Uncertainty is actually holy ground. It is sacred space, which is a gift and a blessing to all of us.

So today, we're in Week #4 of our seven-week series on the "Songs of Life," picking famous songs -- songs that we love -- and extracting a spiritual message and life lessons from them. Week #1 was "Doctor My Eyes" by Jackson Brown. Week #2 was "Daydream" by The Lovin' Spoonful. For last week, we looked at Michael Bublé's "Home." If you've missed it, you can check these out on YouTube. And if you're watching online, you can listen to the song first and then hear the message. It'll have a great impact that way.

Today, we're looking at the 1971 hit by Carly Simon, "Anticipation." And it is a song about the feeling of waiting for someone to arrive -- specifically a date -- and the anxiety and the excitement associated with that anticipation, and how to handle waiting and anxiousness better.

Now the backstory is that Carly Simon had a date with singer/songwriter Cat Stevens. And he was supposed to come to her New York apartment for dinner. And he was late. And she was waiting and wondering, *"Will he like me? Will I like him? Will we hit it off? Will he like my cooking? Suppose we have nothing to talk about? And suppose this doesn't work and it ruins our friendship?"*

So she catches herself, you know, kind of worrying and stressing like this. And she realizes the old adage that says worrying is like a rocking chair: It gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere. And so, she decided, instead of just being anxious and worrying, that she would pick up her guitar and do something. And since he was on her mind, she decided to kind of play in a way that Cat Stevens would play. And since she was already feeling anxiety, she thought she would sing about that.

And here's what she says about it: *"I was anticipating his arrival, so I just started the song. And I wrote the whole song -- the words and the music -- before he even got there. So, in about 15 minutes! This has only ever happened to me three times in my whole career."* And so, from a state of feeling anxious to deciding to do something else, and came up with this beautiful song.

So, this morning we're going to look at four life lessons and a spiritual message that we can glean about uncertainty from "Anticipation."

First thing we learn is to **ACCEPT UNCERTAINTY**. Life is filled with uncertainty. Uncertainty is all around. The economy: it's uncertain. The stock market and our investments: uncertain. You know, all aspects of our lives -- from our health, our relationship, our children, our families ... You know, will our problems be resolved? Will we reach our goals and all of our dreams? They're all uncertain! In fact, everything in our lives that's ahead of us has a certain level of uncertainty.

Eckhart Tolle says if you don't accept uncertainty, and choose to fight against it and resist it and hate it, uncertainty then turns into fear, anxiety and worry, and has a debilitating effect on our lives. You know, our resisting uncertainty actually drains our energy and it really wastes a lot of time. It robs us of the joy of living.

Uncertainty, when you think about it, is absolutely vital. That it is important; it's an important aspect of life. And if you really go deep and think about it, uncertainty is what makes life fun. Uncertainty is what makes life interesting and challenging. Uncertainty is what expands us. I mean, life would be boring if there was no uncertainty! If we lived in certainty, how dull would life be if we knew every outcome? If we knew every answer, every detail? If we knew the score of the game, even before the game was being played, how dull would sports and life be if that were the case?

I absolutely believe that the unknown is what makes life exciting. Because if everything was known and certain, why would we need faith? If there was not uncertainty, there would be no surprises. There would be no miracles. Life would not be so special and magical if we knew everything.

I believe that uncertainty is what makes life intriguing. It makes life joyful; it makes life fulfilling. And it brings out the best in ourselves, whether we realize it or not.

Accepting uncertainty is not weakness; it is wisdom. It frees us and empowers us to not be stuck in the way that we live. Living in fear of the unknown absolutely limits our happiness, our peace and our success.

Eckhart Tolle also said that if we choose to accept and embrace uncertainty, it will turn into aliveness, alertness and creativity.

So, let me ask you, what is uncertain in your life right now? And are you willing to accept it? Are you willing to embrace it? Are you willing to welcome it?

"I accept the uncertainty in my life."

Together: [with congregants] *"I accept the uncertainty in my life."* Take a deep breath into that.

"I embrace the unknown."

Together: [with congregants] *"I embrace the unknown."* Deep breath.

"I don't need to know everything." [Laughs]

Together: [congregants] *"I don't need to know everything."*

Okay, let's say it again: [with congregants] *"I don't need to know everything."*

And finally, *"I am safe and fully supported by life."*

Together [with congregants]: *"I am safe and fully supported by life."*

The unknown is a mysterious but wonderful aspect of our lives, and we need to not fight against it anymore, but fully accept that there is uncertainty. There are things that are unknown that are just a part of this wonderful life.

The second one is that we need to **ADJUST OUR MINDSET**. How many people are watching the PGA championship? Anybody watching it? Okay, so on Friday, this guy named Jhonattan Vegas from Venezuela was leading after 36 holes. The amazing thing is: now, he'd won four regular tournaments in his career; he's a good golfer. But in his 16 major appearances, he did not place in the top 20. And he had never had back-to-back rounds under par. And here he is, leading after 36.

And the reporter says, *"Do you know the last time you were leading after 36 was at the John Deere Classic in 2019?"* And he said, *"So how are you going to keep it together and stay focused, you know, for this time when it's uncharted territory?"*

And he said, *"Well, it's hard. Our brains like to scramble things and go to places that aren't good. So you just have to take it one shot at a time. I know it sounds cliché, but that's what we practice, is for moments like this. And hope that our brains remember."*

How many people have ever let your mind run wild and into negatives and areas about something that you wanted to have? How many people ever have a tough conversation to have, and you just keep rehearsing it and practicing it in your head.

I love what [the song] says. It says:

***We can never know about the days to come
But we think about them anyway***

[Laughs] And one of the things I think he's saying here is that the golf -- playing well and succeeding -- is not just about the physical, but it's making sure that the mental doesn't distract you from performing as well as you can. And that's not just about golf; it's about life. It's not just the physical things that we do, but it's to make sure that our minds don't get in our way and distract us and lead us down a path of negativity that drains our effectiveness.

You know, two things about uncertainty. Number one, it is natural. It is absolutely unavoidable: uncertainty in life. And You know what the second one is? It's neutral. *We* label it as bad. *We* label it as scary. But it is neutral. Like Shakespeare said in Hamlet, *"Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so."*

So, is uncertainty a threat or an opportunity? *"Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so."* So, we can feel overwhelmed by uncertainty, or we can choose to use it and allow it to help us.

You know Paul said, *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* And what he is saying is to readjust your mind in how you think about and have your relationship with the unknown.

I love in the song how she is acknowledging that she doesn't know what tomorrow brings. But I love how she takes charge of herself today. That she does the best she can right where she is. She chooses how

she'll show up, acknowledging she that there's uncertainty in her life. There's uncertainty tomorrow. But *today* She will choose to show up in the best way and control what she can, which is herself.

And so she picks up that guitar in that time of uncertainty and writes this amazing and beautiful song. She adjusted her mindset and took charge, so she used uncertainty to her advantage.

Maggie Jackson wrote a book called *Uncertain: The Wisdom and Wonder of Being Unsure*. And she says that uncertainty, actually -- when used well -- primes us for learning and can improve our overall mental health. She says that when we hit moments of uncertainty where we just don't know, or haven't any idea, what happens is neural pathways get triggered in our brains. And they tend to be more awakened and be receptive to new data. And she said that there's a point that we hit where our brains say, "*Hey, there's something to be learned here!*" when there is uncertainty and the unknown.

So, my question is: In your life right now, where there is uncertainty facing you, are you willing to allow your brain to be triggered to say, "*Hey, there's something to learn here!*"? "*There is some way for me to grow and to understand and to expand my awareness to ideas and greater possibilities.*"

You know, Steve Jobs had his journey of uncertainty. You know, he dropped out of college. And the business that he started he got fired from. And he had an amazing mindset: that he didn't see it as failure; that he didn't see it as time wasted. His mindset shifted to uncertainty and saw it as his teacher, and these experiences were actually helping prepare him for something greater and better in the next phase of his life.

So, when it comes to uncertainty in *your* life, are you willing to adjust your mindset? And to see it as an opportunity? And to see it as an opportunity for you to learn and expand your life and yourself for the better?

The third thing that I think we learned from this song is **THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICING MINDFULNESS**. ONE the greatest gifts that God has given us is our minds: they're creative and they're brilliant in so many ways. But sometimes, when they just keep working and working, they're not as effective. The most important thing we do to get the best and the most out of our minds is learn how to quiet our minds.

You know, when we were told things like, "*Be still and know that I am God*" and "*Let the same mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you,*" the only way we can do that, and get to that high level is to relax our mind. To calm our mind. You know, to allow it to be renewed and refreshed on a regular basis.

And that's what's so wonderful about practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness meditations are about paying attention to the present moment without judgment. And it's -- as we all know -- it's based on just following your breath. As simple as that! Follow your breath in; follow your breath out. As simple as that has a calming and soothing effect on our brains. And when thoughts or feelings pop up, you're just aware of them. And you just keep coming back to the breath.

Something that simple is so powerful! Because the thing about mindfulness: it has so many benefits of reducing stress. You know, it improves our mental health, our cognitive abilities, our overall well-being. It helps us manage our anxiety and our depression; gives us greater quality of sleep; increases our focus, our attention, our self-awareness. It is amazing how something so simple can give us such great benefit.

And it's that simple thing of pausing and quieting the mind that allows the wisdom and genius and the open-mindedness of God -- and that potential of our mind -- to come through us and to come forth.

You know, I'm a huge believer in meditating more consistently. There's nothing wrong with doing it 20 minutes, twice a day. But I really believe that short ones more frequently help us remember to turn within and to connect with Spirit.

How many people have ever said, *"I was too busy to meditate today; I had too many things going on"*? Because it's easy to forget when you do it once a day!

But I suggest doing it shorter and more frequently. Maybe even pausing and doing 10 breaths where you breathe in and you breathe out. And breathe in and breathe out. Just doing that. Or doing it for a minute, or two or three minutes. But doing it frequently and consistently, something powerful happens. The mind remembers how to calm down and how to relax quicker and easier when it's done more frequently.

That makes sense, everybody? Doing it more frequently. It is a powerful thing. And then it brings your mind to the present. It brings your mind to examining possibilities and ideas and allowing inspiration to come through us.

Again, don't underestimate that something is so simple that it can't be that powerful. Because it *is* that powerful! The question is: Are we willing to take the time to practice mindfulness?

And then the last one is to **LIVE IN THE MOMENT**. Here are her words:

***And tomorrow we might not be together
I'm no prophet; I don't know nature's ways
So I'll try and see into your eyes right now
And stay right here 'cause these are the good old days***

You know, sometimes we seem to be waiting until life's perfect. You know, to call it a good day and a great day. Every day is a great day. That we must dance and live in the moment of the perfect imperfection of each and every day.

Sometimes by waiting, we miss real moments. You know, life is a miracle when we are standing on that mountain top feeling like, *"Oh, yeah, I did it!"* And it's just as much of a miracle when we're curled up in the fetal position under the bed crying, thinking, *"I don't ever want to go outside my house again."* And everything in between those two is life. Life is a miracle! Life is *always* a miracle. *"These are the good old days."* Every single day, you know -- from victories to crying -- is a miracle.

I told you this story, but I want to tell it again, about a friend of mine. She got cancer and then she was healed. Then her sister got cancer: terminal cancer. And so, she quit her job. She went on leave for six months to be with her sister, to care for her sister. And they talked every day, and ate together every day, and she supported her every day. They laughed and they cried. There were tears; there was anger; there was sadness; there was compassion; there was heartbreak. All of those feelings. It was painful and it was beautiful. And when she died, her heart was broken. And as sad as she was, and as horrible as that experience was, she said she would not have given up a day of it to be there with her for those last six months. You know, she wished it never happened, but since it did, that she would not have traded that.

Because one of the things is: life is not just about sunshine and flowers and chocolates. It's about fear. It's about loss. It's about grief. It's about hard work. It's about struggle. And all of it is life. All of it's a miracle. And in all of it we should be fully engaged and live and be present to whatever it is that's going on in our lives.

Joseph Campbell, the mystic, said that most people think they're looking for the meaning of life, but they're not. What we're all looking for, he says, is an experience of being fully alive. We want to feel fully alive! And all the experiences together, you know, help us do that. We've got to feel them all.

Thích Nhất Hạnh said, *"You could do the dishes and make it a sacred experience. If you are centered in the Presence, the ordinary can become divine."* Buddha said, *"Take care of this moment, and you take care of all time."*

Just live and be present to this moment, even if it's tears. Even if it's heartache. Even if it's joy. Just be fully present to it. Don't run or hide from life. Don't run and hide from emotions and experiences.

Matthew 6 says, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself."* Whatever is going on in your life today is your life. And the question is: Are you willing to fully be engaged and live those moments?

Fresh out of business school, this young man applied for an accounting job. And he was interviewed by a man who looked very stressed, who was the founder of this small business that he had started. He said, *"I need someone with an accounting degree, but mainly I'm looking for someone to do my worrying for me."* [Congregants laugh]

The accountant said, *"Excuse me?"*

The man said, *"You know, I worry a lot. I worry all the time. It's wearing me down. I worry about money, so now I want you to take over all my money worries. Get that off my back. It'll be your worry now; your problem."*

The guy, the accountant, says, *"I see. But how much do you pay?"*

He says, *"Well, I'll start you at \$85,000."*

He said, *"\$85,000? How on earth can a small business like this afford such a salary?"*

He said, *"Well, that's your first worry."* [Congregants laugh]

Uncertainty is a part of life. Uncertainty -- whether we realize it or not -- adds to the richness and the magnificence of life. But we have to learn how to deal with uncertainty. We don't need to succumb to anxiety and worry. We need to learn how to accept uncertainty; how to adjust our mindset about the unknown; to practice mindfulness; and to live in the moment.

These are the life lessons and the spiritual message from the beautiful song, "Anticipation."

God bless you all!