

CS Lewis once said that we can create situations in which we are happy, but we cannot create joy. It just happens. It's a gift from God.

How many times in your life have you experienced joy: that moment that opens your eyes and heart, sends energy through you right to your fingertips and leaves you stunned with its power and glory.

The things that have taken my breath away—and ironically at the same time have filled my soul with bliss (sorry—there's no other word to describe it), were things that God was responsible for.

I've never felt that nearly "out of body" feeling with anything I've done, or really by anything created by human hands—though art comes the closest.

I believe that every soul on earth longs for joy. But we settle for happiness.

I think that's the point John's gospel makes in the reading today. The author of John is addressing through metaphor that instead of wanting what only God can give us, we settle for all manner of other things.

In this passage, Jesus is dealing with this issue. The same people who he fed so miraculously on the mountain, have hunted Jesus down to where he and disciples are staying.

They were amazed and impressed with Jesus' "trick" with the bread and fish. They want more: more food! Bigger signs! So Jesus says:

*"You came to me today not because you "believe" in anything, you came because I gave you what you wanted – a full belly!*

*Don't spend your time worrying about filling your belly, looking good to the community, being able to do powerful things—all these things are so important to you, but are completely unimportant to God."*

But their thoughts are not on God—they want something they can create all by themselves. So they say to Jesus:

*"So what do I have to give or do to be able to perform these amazing feats?"*

*Jesus shakes his head, “This is the only act that God wants you to “perform”: to believe in the one that God sends.”*

I think many of us can't quite trust that God will bring us joy enough to change our lives if we only believe. We want to be more in control than that. It might not bring joy, but we can settle for happiness.

I was watching the Olympics the other night—as I'm sure many of you were. I must admit, I usually watch most shows through Hulu or Netflix—so I'm not used to the barrage of commercials that seem to occur roughly every 56 seconds. (A bit of exaggeration there.)

I was waiting out the commercial break, being told that I need this item and that medicine—when I was struck by one commercial in particular:

*“It's your guardian angel. It's your muse. It's the Hyundai Elantra.”*

That's quite a statement.

But despite what they say, it's not a heavenly being. And it's not our inspiration. It's a car.

But—the commercial tells us--if we don't want to wait for joy—the car company is more than happy to be our inspiration and our guardian angel. And we will have instant happiness.

But this isn't what God has in mind for any of us. When Jesus talks of “bread” in John it's a metaphor for what comes from God and nourishes us—all of us: our bodies, minds and our souls. Bread. But do we trust that? The people in the gospel certainly aren't buying it.

*“We don't buy it,” they say. “You need to show us we can believe in you. What sign are you going to perform for us so we really know you are who you say you are? After all, Moses gave HIS followers manna straight out of heaven. Give us your best stuff!”*

*“Well, let’s get this straight, “ said Jesus. “GOD gave the manna to the Israelites, not Moses.”*

*“My people,” he says, “that’s the point I’m trying to make: only God can give any of us the type of things that survive our deaths. All the food in the world, riches, power—none of this survives. Only God can give us what will satisfy us, even into eternity. “*

*“Then give us some of that!”*

*“I AM that. I AM what feeds you.(I really hope you catch the fact that Jesus has just used the Hebrew name for God.) The bread I give you will take away your hunger for the meaningless things that currently feed our world. My bread feeds everyone equally: every person, plant, animal and bee – they are all nourished by the depth of God’s being.*

*Set aside your dreams of personal glory, personal wealth, personal pride—what the world prizes-- and reach for the Bread of life,” Jesus says. “It’s for everyone in the kingdom—a precious gift from God.”*

The world will always badgers us to settle for the happiness that comes from what money can buy and what we can create for ourselves.

We *can* produce happiness.

But not the Bread of Life. Not the joy that comes from God. Not that rare, amazing sense of unity to God shows us.

We can’t make it, we can’t manufacture it, we can’t even practice it until we can do it. It’s out of our realm. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t attainable. It’s right here in front of us.

There was another commercial I noticed. It starts with a young woman lying down in a field saying she wants time for quiet, time to relax. Then she looks at her fit bit and says she also needs swimming. And running, and dancing—who has time for quiet time in a field? Go Go GO! That’s our

culture talking. No-- *demanding*. She should have stopped while she was ahead. We all need time for stillness.

But the world tells us to go go go! Do Do DO!

But we can stop trying to do, and go, and achieve—just for several minutes a day-- and open ourselves to the vastness of God. That will really feed us.

Let's always settle for happiness. Let's give joy a chance!

Amen.