I assume that most of you here were children at some point in time and I further assume that most of you had a sibling. Now if neither of these was the case then just humor me for a minute. In growing up, at least in my experience, there was a tendency to want to get a third party involved when things did not go my particular way in regards to interaction with my brother Paul. In my case this third party was generally my mom, although I sometimes branched out to my dad. And the reasons for my wanting their involvement were sometimes legitimate — my brother was trying to light me on fire or see how long he could hold me under water, but most of the time it was for much more pedestrian issues — Paul wouldn’t drive me somewhere or let me borrow his Bachman Turner Overdrive cassette (for you younger people out there Bachman Turner Overdrive are sadly one of the better bands to have ever come out of Canada). What most of these appeals to my mom or dad amounted to were little more than a power grab. I wanted them to tip the scales over to my side so I could get what I wanted. When my brother was preventing me from getting something, I pleaded my case hoping that my parents would tell Paul to do whatever it was that I wanted him to do. The problem that I have discovered with such situations in being a parent, is that being stuck in the middle of two siblings is not a whole lot of fun. The one coming to you may have a point, but most often it comes down to you being asked which child’s desires will be fulfilled. And when the fight is over what kind of Klondike bars to buy at the grocery store or TV show to watch, there is generally not a right answer. Third parties are put in a very tough position because most interventions are going to be seen as liking one child more than the other. And to continue with our Canadian rock bands theme even if you choose not to choose you still have made a choice. But for all of my heartache I was glad to see that Jesus was not immune to such things.

In our Gospel this morning we have the following scene. A man has come to see Jesus and says, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus being infinitely more clever than me does not take the bait and instead responds, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" He then continues saying, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Now here is the interesting thing in Jesus saying that he is not the judge of these two. Because every week in the Nicene Creed we say we believe that, “[Jesus] will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” How can Jesus say he is not a judge in the case of this morning’s Gospel and then we claim that he is going to judge everyone who has ever lived? The answer to this question seems to come in defining what exactly it is that is supposed to be judged. What we are saying will be judged in the Nicene Creed is, to put it rather briefly, the eternal state of our souls, which is very different than Jesus being asked to say who should get dad’s collection of Perry Como records. In the story this morning what is being asked to be judged has more to do with the types of things I discussed in my introduction - that is the things that amount to little more than our personal desires. But as noted earlier Jesus switches the question and shifts it so that he can lay out what it is that he will judge -- he moves away from the immediate question of the inheritance and toward a more eternal question. The brother wanted Jesus to get involved in the division of a family estate but Jesus reminded him that he does not judge things such as that but rather he looks at eternal things like the disposition of this man’s heart in wanting to divide the family estate. That is why he tells him to be careful of greed -- greed being the worship and hoarding of creation rather than the worship of and desire for the creator. In this man’s case Jesus is warning him to make sure that he is not asking God to fulfill his wishes and desires but rather to ask God to keep him from all sin. He is being reminded not to put his will ahead of God’s will because that is the very nature of sin and therefore a very dangerous thing to do in terms of our salvation.

The man this morning really wanted his inheritance and became determined that God must also really want him to have his inheritance. And confusing our will with God’s will is not just an issue that happened a long time ago. I remember reading a story years ago about a man who left the Episcopal Church over a bike path. The story goes like this. In this man’s hometown there was one group who wanted to develop a bike path and their plan involved going across some property owned by the Episcopal Diocese in the area. The Diocese had other plans for the property and so declined to participate in the bike path plan. The man was so incensed by this decision that he left the church, because he felt refusing to allow for a bike path was not a Christian act. Now I do not recall any of Jesus’ parables involving biking nor do I remember any of the disciples riding bikes, so I would be a little surprised if there has been a lot of theological energy devoted to fleshing out God’s views on cycling, but I am going to go out on a limb and say this is one of those areas where someone again confused their own will with the will of God. We may like bike paths or we may hate them but God again is going to look at the disposition of our heart in what we are asking for over our specific opinions on human squabbles.

Now naturally enough we prefer the model wherein we reach a conclusion and then demand God come around to our way of thinking because it is easier; because saying my will be done is always easier. What God asks of us will often go against our inclinations. It may ask us to look to things outside of our immediate desires. And further it will tell us that we are to humble ourselves so that we can be filled with God’s will and desire. So the question in anything we want to do is not whether or not we like it but rather if our motives are pure and Godly. Jesus reframed the man’s question this morning to focus on things God actually cares about. He asks the man to ponder whether his request came from greed and from a soul that sought its fulfillment in something that was not God.

There are a lot of arguments these days between Christians about any of a vast array of subjects. And often the opposing sides both claim to have God on their side. But in all of this are we like the child running to mom so that we can go back and tell our sibling that our desires are the same as mom’s desires? There is an old story about Babe Ruth being called out on strikes. After the last strike Ruth turned to the umpire and said, “There are 40,000 people here who know the last pitch was a ball.” The umpire replied, “Maybe so, but mine is the only opinion that counts.” We can have all of the opinions we want about how things should work, and we can try to convince God to come around to our way of thinking, but in the end it is only God’s opinion that counts. And doing God’s desire should be our desire both this day and forevermore.