I have a somewhat odd fascination with North Korea. Part of this fascination comes from pity; pity for the horrible conditions that those living under the Kim family dynasty have to endure. But part of the fascination is a little more voyeuristic. I am fascinated by the insanity that happens in a society that organizes itself solely on the will of a psychotic hereditary dictatorship dressed up in the guise of a communist regime. One of the crazier outcomes of this total control of the Kim family is the way in which the society is formally stratified and organized in their own pinko caste system. Kongdan Oh ,writing in 2003, explains how stating, “President Kim Il-sung reported to the Fifth Korean Workers’ Party Congress in 1970 that the people could be classified into three political groups: a loyal ‘core class,’ a suspect ‘wavering class,’ and a politically unreliable ‘hostile class.’” But it does not end there. She goes on to say, “Individuals are further classified into 51 subcategories, such as those in the wavering class who had been landowners before the communists came to power, or those who had resided in the southern half of Korea before 1945. The political history of one’s parents, grandparents, and relatives as distant as second cousins is also a determining factor in the classification process.” Or put another way, when a society is arranged around the unquestioned will of one person, we end up with no fewer than 53 categories of people.

I bring this up today because of what we have from St. Paul in Galatians today where we read, “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.…. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”

And, while I realize on the surface this verse and my introduction seem to be unrelated, let me explain why I think these are tied together. But before we do, I want to muddy the waters a little more by adding one more quote. In Matthew 22 we hear this, “And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Okay I am now out of quotes so now let’s try and tie all of this together starting with the bit from Paul.

In the passage from Galatians Paul begins by saying that in the past we were guarded by the law. The basic way this arrangement worked was this: God told us to do or not to do stuff and we obeyed him. Or at least that is how it was supposed to work. The law existed as something outside of us. So if, for example, we were thinking of coveting our neighbor’s sectional sofa, before we actually got around to coveting, we would first need to think back to the Ten Commandments. In so doing we would realize that sectional sofa coveting was forbidden and so we wouldn’t do it. This law came from God and we followed it not because we wanted to but because God told us to. Since we were alienated from God, the ways of God were foreign to us so the only way to get us to obey God’s will was to write it down and enforce it with various carrots and sticks. But then this all changed. With the coming of Jesus and his subsequent ascent into heaven we received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul explains it this way saying, “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.” And because of this God’s ways are no longer alien to us. We do not have to thumb through the Ten Commandments when deciding what behavior is right and what behavior is wrong. Instead, God, who now dwells in us, has changed our hearts and minds so that we want to do the will of God because it is part of who we are. Meaning that coveting our neighbor’s sofa is something we simply do not want to do, not because it says so in the law but because our will is subsumed in God’s will.

Okay, now that gets us to the second passage we have from scripture today which concerns Jesus answering the question about what law is the most important. If we take this in the context of what Paul just told us we really don’t need to wait around for the answer. Loving the Lord our God and our neighbor as ourself should be something that is part of us. We do not need to consult scripture to figure it our but rather know it in the same way that we know what pine-sol smells like.

And so with all of that out of the way it brings me back to my introduction, the North Korean bit about unbridled human will ranking and ordering other humans in the same way someone might sort their stamp collection. For something like this to happen it requires God to be eliminated from the picture, because dividing up humanity into categories of desirable and undesirable is not loving your neighbor as yourself. And while it would be nice to put this aside and say it really only applies to societies as crazy as North Korea this is not true. It applies anytime that we ignore that which is in us that tells us to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The good news about what Paul is telling us today, besides avoiding becoming like North Korea, is that it is not burdensome, but is rather quite freeing. Having the Holy Spirit dwell in us and so envelop us that we want nothing more than to follow God’s will not only makes our life more beautiful but it also makes our lives much easier. If we truly love our neighbors as ourselves, we don’t have to come up with 53 categories of people we can instead just have one and assume that everyone is just like us – sinners who fall short of the glory of God. Yes, some fall shorter, but everyone is still missing the mark. Think about it like this. In the confession of sins, we have in Rite II there are three parts. The first part is the standard confession bit – we have messed up by doing bad stuff and by not doing good stuff. The second part asks God for forgiveness. Then there is a wonderful third part which can get overlooked but it anticipates what our life will look like after our confession and forgiveness. It says that we will, “delight in your will, and walk in your ways.” Getting rid of sin and following in God’s ways by having God’s laws written on our hearts is not a burden or something that spoils our good time but is rather delightful.

Think of it like this. In Wisconsin there are times where we have all driven in snow storms. If you are like me when you are driving in one you have a death grip on the steering wheel; all of your muscles are tense and your amygdala is flooding your body with hormones making every part of you on the lookout for any danger. But then comes the moment where you have made it safely to your destination and you can relax. You no longer are scanning the horizon in dread. Every muscle and mental faculty are now able to turn to something more delightful and lovely. That is what being in sync with God’s will should look like. When we follow our will we act like we are driving in a snowstorm or running a lousy country in southeast Asia, but when we follow God’s will we are able to relinquish control to God. It may not always be easy or the way we would have planned it, but it will be delightful now and forevermore.