

John 17:1-11 – May 24, 2020

I had a friend years ago who was in a car accident. Let's call her... Anne. That's not her real name, but these sermons are over the internet now and I don't want to embarrass her.

Thankfully, nobody was injured in this car accident. But it was messy, from a legal standpoint. Lots of blame to go around. When everything was said and done, however, it turned out that Anne was the one who was cited. And she was devastated. It put immediate points on her driving record. Carried with it the possibility of a \$2,000 fine and a 6-month suspension of her license. It was horrible.

But it turned out that Anne had a friend. A friend who happened to be a lawyer. And he offered to take her case pro-bono and do what he could. So when her court date came, they arrived together at traffic court in downtown Akron, OH.

It was crowded. Lines of people. Case after case going before the judge. Churning through parking tickets and speeding tickets and DUI's and all such cases.

And then her name was called and her attorney stepped forward and announced himself. "I'm so-and-so and I'll be representing Anne." And instantly, everything ground to a halt. The rapid procession of cases. The hurried, stressful atmosphere. Everything stopped. Because Anne had brought a lawyer to traffic court.

No one brings a lawyer to traffic court. And instantly the assistant prosecutor sitting off to the side, rubber stamping everything the judge did, sprang to her feet and rushed to get her file together, finally asking, "Judge, can we have a short recess."

So Anne's lawyer and the prosecutor went off by themselves for a few moments, and her lawyer returned with a smile on his face. And he told her, "You had a broken taillight. \$100 fine. No points on your license." Wait... what? She got into a car accident. She didn't have a broken taillight!

But as far as the state of Ohio was concerned, she did. That was all she did in fact. There were no other laws broken. There was no accident, even. Under the plea bargain, there was just a broken taillight. And that was all.

It's good to have a lawyer. Our society goes on to no end about how horrible lawyers are and about how we'd be so much better without them. "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers," Shakespeare writes. But the truth is, as long as the law exists, we need lawyers. A good lawyer can be the difference between a horrible accident and a broken taillight.

And I think we might be more prone to look at lawyers in a better light if we realized that Jesus' role in our salvation is very much that of a lawyer. We couch it in Biblical language. He's our intercessor. He's our advocate. He's our mediator. But these are really all descriptions of what a lawyer does. A lawyer intercedes. A lawyer advocates. A lawyer mediates. It's what they do.

And it's what Jesus does in our Gospel lesson today. He intercedes for his disciples: "*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*" That is an intercession. He is asking the Father to give us something we wouldn't otherwise receive. Because His holy name carries more weight than our sinful names.

He advocates for his disciples: "*They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.*" He is pleading with the Father on our behalf. That even though we are sinners who should be punished with death and hell, we believe in Jesus. We believe that God the Father sent Jesus to forgive our sins. And for that reason alone, we should be saved.

And he mediates for his disciples: *“Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.”* No, we don't deserve eternal life. But the Father has granted the Son the authority of a mediator, to decide our fate. And, as mediator, the Son has decided that we should have eternal life, even though we don't deserve it.

And despite the fact that Jesus carries out these roles as intercessor and advocate and mediator and lawyer for our good. For our salvation. There are still many people who reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because the people most in need of a lawyer are the people guilty of a crime.

My friend Anne didn't want to admit that. She wanted to point to everything the other guy had done. All the crimes he committed. All the laws he broke. And if she had gone to traffic court by herself, she probably would have said all that to the judge. And he would have looked at her and said, “Yes, but you still broke the law. And you still have to pay a penalty for that.”

We don't want to admit our guilt. We want to point at the other guy and say, “It's all his fault. It's all her fault. He's a liar. She's a horrible person. I only did it because he hurt me. I only said that because of what she did. I'm not any worse than them. I didn't have any choice. I'm the victim here.”

And you're welcome to believe that your entire life and point the finger anywhere but yourself. But one day, you're going to stand in a courtroom much bigger than traffic court, against a judge much more powerful than any human judge. And your finger pointing isn't going to get you anywhere.

Because God is going to look down upon you and say, “Yes, that may all be true. But you still broke my law. You still did those things. You still said those things. You still thought those things. And you still have to pay the penalty for that.”

And at that moment, the only thing that will save you, is if your lawyer – your intercessor, your advocate, your mediator – stands up and says, “Wait. I'm representing him. I'm representing her. Let's talk.”

And suddenly, you're not guilty of the crime anymore. Because a plea bargain has been struck. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has taken your case. And the devastating penalty of sin is no more.

Jesus Christ has prayed for you. He has talked to the judge for you. Because you were given to Him in the waters of Holy Baptism. Because you were given to Him by faith in His Word. Because you are His friend and He is taking your case pro-bono. Because you belong to Him.

And he has shown how much you are worth to him, how much he loves you, by going to the cross for you. By shedding his blood for you. By dying for you. He has prayed for you all the way to the very last moments of his life. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

And he is still praying for you. This prayer he made never ended. And it will never end. That's what the Ascension is all about. It is Jesus visibly ascending into the clouds. Into the glory of heaven. To take his seat at his Father's side.

And be our lawyer. To sit there, day after day, praying for us. Pleading our case. Pointing to the blood he shed and the forgiveness he promised. And erasing from our names the guilt of sin.

All the way until that day when Father and Son together come fully into the glory of the resurrection. Until that day when the protection of God's name upon us, his children, is complete, and we stand in perfect unity. Until that day when we see Jesus return just the way he left us. And we join him in a glory like that which shown when the world began.

Only then will the work of Christ be complete. Only then will the prayer he makes be finished. Only then will the case be closed and the courts adjourned. So rejoice! You have a lawyer who loves you. And you belong to him. Amen.