**SUNDAY, 11/14/21**

**SERMON**

**HEBREWS 10:11-14 [15-18] 19-25**

Many years ago railroad employees had to go out to the tracks

 and hold up warning lanterns whenever there was an emergency.

One dark and stormy night Brad Boyar was sent out with his lantern

 to warn upcoming trains of damage on the bridge just a head.

As a train approached, Brad held his lamp up high.

But the approaching train ran off the rails and into a ditch,

 and many people were injured.

Brad Boyar was taken to court.

The authorities wanted to know why the conductor of the train

 did not pay attention to Brad's lantern warning of the danger ahead.

The Judge asked Mr. Boyar:

“Were you on duty on the night the train had the accident?”

Brad replied: "Yes Sir."

The Judge then asked: "Did you have your lamp with you?"

Brad answered: "Yes Sir."

The judge asked one last question: "Did you wave your lamp at the train?"

Again, Brad answered: "Yes Sir."

The Judge ruled that Brad Boyar was not held responsible for the accident.

After the court proceedings, Brad was walking home with his friend Roger.

Along the way he told Roger:

“I am really glad the judge did not ask me if my lamp was on.”

Brad had been where he was supposed to be,

 doing what he was supposed to be doing,

 except that his lantern was not lit.

No matter what Brad did, without his light being on,

 the oncoming train was surrounded by darkness

 and could not receive the warning,

God knows how important light is.

In the beginning God said: "Let there be light."

And there was light.

And He saw the light was good.

Our reading from Daniel this morning tells us:

 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky,

 like the stars forever and ever.

Brad Boyar apparently didn't get the message,

 and many people were harmed.

We are to be God's light in the world.

We are not to hide our light.

We are to hold it high, and give light to everyone around us.

And we need to make sure our lights are burning brightly.

Jesus taught us:

 "Let your light so shine that people may see your good works

 and glorify your Father in heaven."

We were created to be the light in the darkness of this world.

God wants us to shine brightly in this world

 through our deeds, our words, and our prayers.

We are to be God's shining light like the stars always shining.

We are to light up the world.

We are to keep the light shining every day and every night,

 and light up the darkness in the lives of others.

But it isn't always easy.

We become discouraged and frustrated.

And often we simply want to give up.

Our reading this morning from Hebrews reminds us:

 Let us consider how to provoke one another

 to love and good deeds,

not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some,

 but encouraging one another.

Throughout the Bible God offers us encouragement and strength,

 and provokes us to encourage each other,

 and build one another up.

The term provoke is interesting because it is not often used in this way:

 that we provoke one another to love and good deeds.

We tend to use the word encourage one another to love and good deeds.

Yet often we humans do not listen well.

We need to be provoked to continue to do God's will, God's way.

The Church youth group was on a work trip to Kentucky.

They began with great enthusiasm.

They were working on a woman's house

 which had been severely damaged by a hurricane.

They started working hard, but before long it wasn't very much fun anymore.

It really wasn't a happy place to be.

The teens had never seen such a devastated area.

Porches and front yards were littered with old cars, sofas, and garbage.

Before long they obviously would rather be doing something else.

They began to make fun of the way those people lived.

They picked on each other.

They argued.

They criticized everything and everybody.

They were rude, obnoxious, and sarcastic.

Eventually the woman who owned the house came out

 with tears streaming down her face.

She asked the youth group to sit down in the grass in front of the house.

She looked at each of them eye to eye.

She wiped away the tears and spoke quietly but clearly.

"What is wrong with you kids?

 Don’t you know?

 Don’t you know I’ve been praying for a long time

 for someone to show up and help me?

 Don’t you know how badly my kids

 need to have bedrooms, and a bathroom that works?

 Don't you understand we don't want to live like this?

 I have been praying for a long time.

 Don't you know you are the answer to my prayers?

 Why don’t you treat each other like the answer to my prayers?"

From that moment on, everything changed.

Instead of obligation, the work became true mission.

Instead of tearing each other down, they built each other up.

It was amazing.

When someone tells you that you are the answer to a prayer, everything changes.

It provokes you.

It provokes you to do good.

It provokes you to be the answer to someone's prayer.

We are the answer to the prayers of so many who dreamed

 of a community of faith which would really do something special.

Many have prayed for a church of people of amazing grace,

 people who welcome the stranger,

 and don’t feel they have to pretend that they don't struggle

 and that they have it all together.

We need to be real,

 helping each other,

 supporting one another on this journey of life.

Being a provoker doesn't mean we have to be a perfect person.

 it simply means we have to be a person

 doing our best in the situations where we find ourselves,

 holding fast to our faith,

 and offering help and encouragement to each other.

Then we can truly be stars shining in the darkness.

Together we can light up the world.

AMEN