



1963



2013

“What is your life?”

“It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

Jacob’s prayer expresses my feelings as I look back over the last fifty years: “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant” (Genesis 32:10).

On September the 12th, 2013 it was fifty years since I immigrated to Europe to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

I was planning to be a missionary when I entered college, but had not chosen a field. During two weeks before school started, I had a job chopping weeds on the ACC campus and met a Dutchman, Cor van Ewijk, who was doing the same. A friendship developed, he invited me to come to Holland, and I took private Dutch lessons from him for one year.

After graduation in 61, with a major in oral interpretation and minors in Bible and Greek, I helped with evangelistic campaigns in Salmon Arm, British Columbia and Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

That fall I started preaching for the church in Sarnia, Ontario with the understanding that I would be going to Europe after a year. I wanted to have some preaching experience in English before going overseas. At Sarnia I took private Dutch lessons from a school teacher from Holland.

The first part of 63, after holding meetings at Beamsville, Ontario and Weyburn, Saskatchewan, I travelled to raise support. Before going to Holland I studied Dutch full-time for a month with the

Berlitz language school in Houston, and took two summer courses in mission methods at the Harding Graduate School in Memphis.

My first year in Holland I averaged 20 hours per week studying Dutch, including instruction from two speech therapists. I took regular private lessons in Dutch for the first five years.

After working for a year and a half with Dan Boyd in Utrecht and one summer in Amsterdam, I accepted an invitation in the fall of 65 to work with the church in Ostend, Belgium. They were the only Flemish congregation at the time.

During my two years in Ostend, literature was distributed to every door in the city three times and an evangelistic campaign was conducted with the help of five brethren from Holland.

In spite of these efforts, I was not able to arrange a single home Bible study in Ostend!

The summer before I moved to Belgium, however, while at Aylesbury Bible School to teach a class on preaching, Phil Slate gave me a Herald of Truth contact from Roeselare, which is near Ostend. After some correspondence, I began regular studies with the Denys family in Roeselare.

When the first two were baptized in November of 66, I taught them how to conduct worship in their home, continued regular Bible studies, and at their invitation moved to Roeselare the summer of 67.

The fall of 67 I started teaching two days a week at the School of the Bible in Verviers, Belgium and continued this until the school closed in 70 upon the Taylor's return to the States.

The summer of 68 Rita and I were married. We both had attended high school for four years at Radville Christian College in Saskatchewan. She had been a widow for 7 years, so I also gained an eight-year old son, Stuart! In due time our two daughters were born, Tonia and Connie. We now have ten grandchildren, the icing on the cake of life!

In Roeselare I was able to arrange home Bible studies and soon was averaging three per week. These resulted in baptisms and by 69

there were seven men in the congregation, most of whom had learned to teach and preach. In each congregation I make it my aim to “declare the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:29) and to teach the men to serve according to their ability. I emphasize that we must carefully follow God’s word in all that we do in His name! On January 11, 1970, two men were appointed as elders and my work at Roeselare was then under their oversight.

To heed the great commission, we decided we should preach to all of Flanders. Since local newspaper ads had been effective, in 1970 the congregation (at their own expense) started placing want ads once a month in one and a half million homes throughout Flanders to advertise a Bible correspondence course. It was agreed that the other brethren would follow up local contacts and that I would study with those who were farther away.

As a result of home Bible studies from these ads, couples were baptized in Kortrijk and Kessel-Lo, whom I taught to worship in their homes and visited regularly for study. Unfortunately both fell away. In Kessel-Lo they were afraid they would lose Catholic social services. In Kortrijk they decided it was a burden to worship every Lord’s day, and that they could worship God just as well by going for a walk in the woods!

There was good response from the Antwerp area and the first part of 71 I studied with several families there, but none became Christians.

On November 21st of 71 Richard Amssoms Sr. who lived in Merksem (a suburb of Antwerp) was baptized, and two weeks later his wife, Gilda, was baptized. In time, others they knew were also baptized. Each Thursday evening I went from Roeselare for a Bible study, and they conducted their own worship on Sundays. This was a three or four hour trip each way because there was not yet a freeway between Gent and Antwerp. It took an hour just to get through Gent.

At the invitation of the Merksem brethren, we moved to the Antwerp area (Beveren-Waas) in August of 72.

This was also more central for home Bible studies. I usually had eight studies in progress in a two-week cycle throughout Flanders, often driving between one and two hours each way for the studies.

In January of 72 we started having a student evangelist come for one year. Eight came in all, Mark Brazle, Wendell Bailey, Blair Roberts, Kerk Roberts, Lyn Meter, Brian Olson, John Smith and Dave Pennington. These young men were chosen and sent by the elders of the church in Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

In May of 73 Mark Brazle came back with a group of six students for a month's campaign. 176,000 enrolment cards for a Bible course were distributed in all major cities of Flanders. Similar groups came each summer for three more years. The last year two groups came for one month each. It was extremely hot and only 73,000 cards were distributed that summer. Larry Good and Paul Brazle were among those who came for summer campaigns.

In 72 and 73 I studied with, and baptized a family in Oudenaarde, and taught them to worship in their home. I studied with a man in Gent and baptized him (he had been my neighbor in Ostend), and he worshiped with the Oudenaarde brethren.

After several years, the church in Oudenaarde disbanded when they decided to join the local Protestant Church, supposedly to help them learn the truth from the inside. That of course never works. How can you encourage people to abandon a bad tree while nesting in it?

On February 26 of 75 I baptized a man in Boortmeerbeek. For some months he drove to Merksem for worship. When another man I was studying with in that area was baptized, they started meeting together in Boortmeerbeek. In June of 76 both of their wives were baptized.

In 76 we moved to the Hasselt area and started worshiping with a couple who had been contacted by card distribution. The student evangelist that year, distributed 43,000 enrolment cards in Maaseik, Maastricht en Tongeren.

After studies with Hans and Ans van Erp in Asten, Holland near Eindhoven, they were baptized in November of 76 and started meeting in their home. They taught and baptized their neighbor and formed the core of the church in Eindhoven.

On November 11th, 77 Mark and Jill Brazle, and Larry and Gale Good arrived in Leuven to begin a team effort. Blair and Susan Roberts joined them in January of 78.

In 79 and 80 I studied with a couple in Gent who were baptized. We met with them for a while and tried to help them form a congregation, but because of addiction to alcohol and sleeping pills, they fell away.

Rita deserves much credit for keeping the home fires burning for many years while I was away three or four nights a week conducting home Bible studies. The student evangelists also ate five meals a week in our home.

By 1980 there were congregations throughout Flanders, so I decided to concentrate my efforts closer to home and to pass distant contacts on to others. The baptism of Willy De Groot and his family resulted from such a "passed on" contact.

In 93 I started serving as a visiting speaker for various congregations in Belgium and Holland. At present I preach once a month in Eindhoven and Den Dolder, Holland and in Brussels, Belgium, in addition to working with the church in Burcht, which meets in the afternoon.

In 97 I launched the Old Paths Archive on the Internet (oldpaths.com) which now has about a thousand visitors each day. I also publish 20 other web sites with teaching material in Dutch, French, German, Russian and Chinese. All of these sites combined get about a million visitors per year.

The sermons I preach each month to 100 people in Holland and Belgium are published on the Internet in text and audio. I prepare them with the same care I would if I were preaching to 20,000 people, the number who consult my lessons each year.

In 2001 we were invited to start working with a house church in Burcht, which in the meantime meets in a rented hall and has mutated into an English language congregation. On June 13, 2010 we had a foretaste of heaven. The sixteen present around the Lord's table (including visitors from two other congregations) could communicate in nineteen languages! (Aramaic, Bassar, Chinese, Dutch, English, Ewe, Gallego, German, Fanti, French, Italian, Nzema, Papiamento, Polish, Portugese, Sign language for the deaf, Spanish, Turkish and Twi).

The Strathmore congregation in Toronto mails out Video DVD's of five lectures I gave there in 2006 entitled: "Can we be the church of the New Testament?" So far they have been sent to 430 addresses in 44 countries. An African brother told me that he shows the five lessons from village to village using a laptop and a portable power supply to encourage people to be Christians only.

I am thankful that the Lord has enabled me to serve Him in the Dutch-speaking part of Europe these 50 years. I am also thankful for our supporters (many of whom have gone to be with the Lord), for faithful fellow workers, and for dedicated Flemish and Dutch Christians among whom we have been privileged to serve.

Roy Davison (December 2013)

<http://www.oldpaths.com/RD>