

The following is a writing which was published in History of Living Christianity in America.

Caleb Erickson (Hietaniemi) was born February 6, 1878 in Northern Sweden (Norrbottenlan.) This was in that part of the world where the living Christianity came into power during this period of visitation. He was born to Christian parents and was instructed in matters of faith and conscience from his early childhood. When he had grown to young manhood, he worked for a time for the elder Isak Kuoksu.

Caleb was a serious minded young man and was put to work as a prayer-keeper. He also accompanied the older preachers on many preaching trips. This was during the years when a great fire of awakening was spreading through the country with entire villages repenting at some localities. As Caleb had grown up in the Christianity, he was a witness to these events and could recount in later years the happenings of the early days of this Christianity.

Around the turn of the century the new land of America was calling many of the young people from Scandinavia. Caleb, too, felt the urge to seek for a better life across the wide Atlantic and he left Sweden in 1907. Upon reaching Hancock, Michigan, he remained for a short time before going on farther West. He found employment in the Western mountains on a crew building a railroad through the rough and rugged country. This life was an entirely new experience for him. For most of his life he had lived among Christians but now he had to work and live among rough, ungodly men.

His railroad career was to be short lived, however. Before long his health failed and to increase his troubles, the contractor refused to pay his crew and the men had to hire a lawyer to collect their wages for them. This trouble on top of his poor health had him quite beaten. Discouraged, both naturally and spiritually, Caleb went on the Astoria, Oregon and there among Christians who were strangers to him, he was scarce able to believe himself a Christian.

Coming back again toward the East he filed for a homestead near Belden, North Dakota. In 1918 he married a widow with young children, Helny Petersson, from Sparta, Minnesota. With his new family he returned to his homestead in North Dakota. After two hard years on the prairie they moved to Sparta. A number of Christians were living in the Sparta area, most of them having come from Northern Sweden and both the Finnish and Swedish languages were used in their meetings.

Caleb became the locality preacher in Sparta and also traveled with other missionary men throughout America. His wife, Helny, died in 1938. They had one surviving daughter, Eva, born to them after their marriage and it was with her that he spent his last days. Eva and her husband, Henrik Pedersen, and family

moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1953 and he was staying with them when death called him away in 1955. His earthly portion now rests in the cemetery at Gilbert, Minnesota but his soul has gone to enjoy the reward of the faithful in the heaven of glory.

It was on Caleb's travels from the West Coast that he stopped in the Black Hills of South Dakota where there were a number of living Christians, that he was able to renew his faith and again believe himself to be a true Christian. It was some time in that period that he was told of the widow living in Sparta.

My mother, Eva, says that her father Caleb was an outspoken person, saying just what he thought. For example: When he first met Helny she told him he looked like a tramp. He replied, "You don't look so good yourself." And from that meeting they found some attraction that led to marriage!

Caleb worked in the iron ore mines in the Sparta area until his retirement. He never drove a car, depending on public transportation or rides from those who owned a car. They raised much of their own food on their small homestead.

When he was on one of his preaching trips he dreamed of first a larger wooden box. And then came a smaller wooden box. This dream haunted him. Not long after he learned that one of Helny's sons, Emil was found drowned in the lake. About three months later his youngest daughter, Evelyn, died of a sudden illness. This brought much sadness as she was the light of his life.