



Giethoorn unveiling plaque at the Mennonite vicarage Photo: Wilbert Bijzitter

Giethoorn Reverend Abraham Mulder saves six refugees: on May 4th their families commemorate this with the unveiling of a plaque

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GIETHOORN – ‘During World War II, six Jewish refugees were hidden in the vicarage in the period 1943 till 1945. Thanks to the outstanding courage of the Reverend Abraham Mulder (1893-1968) all of them survived the war.’ This impressive script adorns the plaque, that the widows of the refugees unveiled on Sunday, May 4th. ‘Whoever saves a single life, saves a world entire.’ These words were said in two moving speeches, prior to the unveiling, in the Mennonite Church.

In the church, about forty relatives of three of the six refugees, are present. Among them two +90 year olds and a six month old baby, the fourth generation. ‘These decendants wouldn’t have been here if the Reverend Mulder would not have given shelter to their Jewish (fore)fathers, in the vicarage’, speaker Jolien Manassen says. She tells that her father, Loet Manassen from Amersfoort, found shelter in the vicarage, at age 19. He and his 16 year old brother Joost, Hans Lakmaker from Amsterdam, and three other Jews, stayed there for three years.

Threats

Jolien tells about two occasions in which the refugees were almost betrayed. The first threat came from the maid Hennie Schreur. She caught the flu and became delirious, telling about the refugees in the vicarage. Her father was about to confront the Reverend Mulder, but Mulder’s wife was able to keep him from it. ‘She played an important role,’ Jolien emphasizes. ‘And the same counts for their youngest daughter Tine, who bought food on food stamps in the whole region, in order not to raise suspicion.’

Another threat came from a boy staying with the Mulder family in the vicarage. He was surprised about the small room he stayed in. ‘In that house must be refugees,’ he said later on to painter Piet Zwiers. He grabbed the boy by his collar and adjured him to keep his mouth shut.

The next speaker, Amnon Manassen, Joost Manassen’s son, celebrates the Reverend Mulder’s courage. ‘He risked his own life in order to save as many people as possible.’ He ends his speech with the significant Hebrew saying ‘Whoever saves a single life, saves a world entire.’ This saying, that is also on the plaque, is also named by the third speaker, Judith Manassen. ‘I find it touching that, for the first time in my life, I may meet the Reverend Mulder’s decendents,’ she says.

Escape hatch

One of the decendents of the Reverend Mulder is Jan Willem de Wilde. He remembers his grandfather as a silent, but also humorous, decent man with a divine sense of duty. Corien van Ark guides him, and other grandchildren through the vicarage. She shows them the rooms, in which the refugees stayed. The escape hatch makes a big impression. ‘That hatch was there in the floor of this room. It lead through this closet into a small space above the doors between the ground floor and the first floor,’ she points out. She explains that the refugees hid there during a razzia, or when the Germans came into the house.

The plaque in the front garden of the vicarage is exactly the same size as the escape hatch. Ruth Manassen (92), Joost’s wife, and Martha (95), Loet’s wife, unveil the plaque. Ruth lives in Israël and had her passport renewed, to be able to travel to the Netherlands. Today, at the 4th of May, she celebrates her 92nd birthday. ‘When I’m back in Israël, I am going to tell that there were people who stood up for us,’ she says in the church.

Momentum

The gathering was organised bij Jolien, her sister Ellemieke, and the present Reverend Gerke van Hiele. This reverend got talking to one of Loet’s grandsons, who was visiting the Mennonite Church. This is how the idea of having a plaque made, arose. On the day of the unveiling, Jolien says ‘This was the momentum! Everything came together: it’s been 80 years since the Netherlands were liberated, one family from Israël had planned a vacation in the Netherlands and the church has a reverend, who is interested in history.’ Van Hiele just moved house, the vicarage is empty, which makes it the perfect time for a tour.

Van Hiele adresses the visitors in the church: ‘God’s light and love are stronger than the darkness. Let us share that together as comfort.’ But the most impressive moment is when all decendents, together with two greatgranddaughters sing Leonard Cohen’s song in the house of God. First hesitant, but then lustily: Hallelujah, Hallelujah.’



Hilda Knol