

ST. STEPHEN'S EAST DELTA UNITED CHURCH
June 6th, 2101, The Second Sunday After Pentecost

The Reverend Doug Graves

"BY REASON OF STRENGTH"

Readings – Psalm 90 and John 17:1-2, 6, and 17-23

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible's translation of Psalm 90, verse 10, reads: "*The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps 80, if we are strong*"

It's clear and straightforward – no confusion about what is meant.

That's probably a good thing. But I, for one, miss the older translation. It read "*The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore...*"

There's something about the "score" business that sounds.... well... biblical.

Whichever translation we use, the United Church of Canada all across the country is today celebrating the fact that we've surpassed the biblical mark. Indeed, on this coming Thursday we, "*by reason of strength*", will be fourscore and five – which is to say eighty-five years old.

This morning I would like to briefly review the decades that brought us to this point – to remember our history in the belief that by remembering we might know what particular strength we have and more importantly what God has and continues to call us to.

We begin then in **1925**. In Canada Arthur Meighen's Conservatives win a plurality (116 seats), defeating Mackenzie King's Liberals (99 seats). However, King does not resign as prime minister; he will try to govern with a minority government with the support of smaller parties and independent MPs (30 seats)

John Logie Baird, a Scottish inventor, transmits human features by a device he calls television. Adolf Hitler publishes Volume I of Mein Kampf. Tennessee schoolteacher John T. Scopes is arrested for teaching the theory of evolution, forbidden by state law. Al Capone takes over the Chicago bootlegging racket.

St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, founded in 1891 as only the third Presbyterian Church in the Lower Mainland of BC, becomes part of the brand new United Church of Canada.

In the Stanley Cup, Victoria (WCHL) defeated Montreal (3-1) The Victoria Cougars are the last non-NHL team to win the Stanley Cup.

In **1935** Nazis enact Nuremberg Laws against Jews to prevent "racial pollution." Heinrich Himmler starts breeding program to produce "Aryan super race." William Aberhart's Social Credit Party wins a majority in Alberta, defeating Richard G. Reid's United Farmers of Alberta.

On the coast Dr. Peter Kelly became the missionary on the Thomas Crosby Boat. He was later to become the first native President of the BC Conference of the United Church.

Andrew Roddan was the minister at First United Church in Vancouver. He was a fluent and able preacher. The average attendance at services was a thousand with 85 percent of them being men. In one year he conducted 230 weddings and 130 funerals, only six of those were attached to the church. In one day they recorded 1,252 people in the soup line at the church.

In the Stanley Cup, The Montreal Maroons defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs (3-0)

In **1945** Adolph Hitler commits suicide; and Germany surrenders. Atomic bombs are dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A B-29 bomber flies into the Empire State Building, damaging the 78th and 79th floors and killing 13.

In Canada Mackenzie King's Liberals win a third consecutive majority. And Family Allowance payments are introduced.

In British Columbia the United Church's Superintendent of Home Missions Percy Bunt said "*Our Canadian brethren of Japanese ancestry should be much in our prayers. The needless breaking up of their homes, the disposition of their property, and the Un-Christian attitude of many of our people in both public and private life, makes one hang his head in shame*"

At this time there were eight Japanese congregations in the United Church of Canada

In the Stanley Cup, Toronto defeats Detroit (4-3)

In **1955** The Soviet Union and seven East European countries sign the Warsaw Pact, a mutual defence treaty. The US starts sending \$216 million in aid to Vietnam. Rosa Parks refuses to sit at the back of the bus, breaking Montgomery, Alabama, segregated seating law. Martin Luther King, Jr., leads 381-day black boycott of Montgomery bus system

The Premier of British Columbia is W.A.C. Bennett who is also a member of First United Church in Kelowna. BC.

In the Stanley Cup: Detroit defeats Montreal (4-3). A riot erupts in Montreal when Maurice "the Rocket" Richard is suspended for fighting.

In **1965** the first US combat troops arrive in Vietnam. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and more than 2,600 others arrested in Selma, Ala., during demonstrations against voter-registration rules

The Premier of British Columbia is still W.A.C. Bennett. The Maple Leaf becomes the National Flag of Canada. Canadian Roman Catholic churches celebrate mass in the vernacular for the first

time due to the reforms of Vatican II. And the eligibility age for pensions is lowered from 70 to 65.

Roy Bonisteel comes to British Columbia to be the director of broadcasting for the United Church and starts a very popular radio program called "God Talk." He would later have a long and very successful run as the host of a CBC Television program called "Man Alive"

In the Stanley Cup, Montreal defeats Chicago (4-3).

In **1975** The Vietnam War ends. John N. Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman are found guilty of Watergate cover-up. The Premier of British Columbia is David Barrett, but before the year is over, Bill Bennett is elected as the new premier

The beaver becomes an official symbol of Canada, Environment Canada switches to degrees Celsius. The Altair home computer kit allows consumers to build and program their own personal computers.

The United Church of Canada sets up a task force for the abolition of Capital Punishment, a position held for twenty years previous. Many congregations in the United Church sponsored 'boat people' as refugees from Viet Nam.

At St Stephen's Isla Lawrie is in her third year as the new organist-choir director. Worship begins at 9:30a.m and must finish promptly by 10:30 so that the minister can make it back to Ladner in time for the 11:00a.m service.

In the Stanley Cup, Philadelphia defeats Buffalo (4-2).

In **1985** under the slogans of glasnost and Perestroika, the new Premier of the Soviet Union Gorbachev initiates a broad program of reform and liberalization.

Premier of British Columbia is still Bill Bennett.

Rock Hudson dies of AIDS at age 59. He's the first major star to fall victim to the disease. Apple computer introduces the LaserWriter printer and Aldus PageMaker, which marked the beginning of home desktop publishing.

In the United Church the whole denomination is involved in the study of sexual orientation and the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the church.

In the Stanley Cup, Edmonton defeats Philadelphia (4-1),

In **1995** 800,000 were killed in Rwanda, Bosnia and Croatia were at war, and the criminal trial of O. J. Simpson opens in California. The Premier of British Columbia was Mike Harcourt.

In Ottawa the opening of Parliament is televised for the first time. And the law against homosexual adoption is struck down by the Supreme Court

Forrest Gump wins the Academy Award for Best Picture... Amazon and eBay are open for business.

On the Ladner –St Stephen’s Pastoral Charge, the Rev. Wendy Bily is completing her 9th year as the lead minister, and Dr Alan Reynolds is serving the St Stephen’s congregation as weekend supply. This new arrangement allows the St Stephen’s folk to sleep for an extra half-hour.

In the Stanley Cup, New Jersey defeats Detroit (4-0).

In **2005**, Hurricane Katrina in the United States shows that the world’s leading super power -its resources stretched to the breaking point Iraq - is unprepared to deal with the aftermath of a large natural disaster. The hurricane destroys the cradle of Jazz, New Orleans.

In Rome, the death of Pope John Paul II marks the end of an era in the life of the Roman Catholic Church.

In Canada the United Church of Canada joins with the Quakers, the Unitarians, and Association of Reformed Jewish Synagogues to urge support for legislation legalizing same sex marriages.

After a very tumultuous year –dominated by what is called the Sponsorship Scandal – Prime Minister Paul Martin is completely cleared of any wrongdoing, but his minority Liberal Government is brought down in a vote of no confidence anyway.

On the Ladner – St Stephen’s Pastoral Charge Captain Jim Short is the lead minister, and someone named Doug Graves is serving as weekend supply at St Stephens. After more than 30 years of service, Isla Lawrie has retired as the organist, and Lee Fraser is now holding fort

In the Stanley Cup... well... actually... because of a players strike there was no Stanley Cup in 1975!

Which brings us to today. Jim Short is still our pastoral charge lead minister. Doug Graves, as you’ve no doubt noticed, is still babbling on at St Stephens. Wendy Bily is helping them both, thank God! And Isla Lawrie is back at the organ – for today - so that Lee can have a Sunday off.

The roof needs to be fixed - but we have the money to do it. Adults and children alike are rejoicing in God’s goodness, and food is still going regularly to First United.

The Stanley Cup? As many of you know, The Chicago Blackhawks and the Philadelphia Flyers are tied at two wins each. But the smart money, of course, is on..... well... maybe I won’t go there...

It's the 85th Anniversary of the United Church - time to give thanks, and time to remember that in all this history there was always one who was with us, guiding us on the way. This God of Abraham and Sarah who gave them a promise of new life when they had doubts about any future - this God who in Jesus called people to join him in the mending of the world- this God whose love, in Paul's words that we heard just last week *"has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."*

We're fourscore and five and the reason for our strength is always, not our traditions, not our being the largest Protestant Church in Canada- it is always simply the God who guides us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.