

February 29th

The Revd Dr Stella Wood

It was with some trepidation that I checked out the card shop for today, Leap Day, February 29th. After a remarkably cheesy range of Valentine's day cards a fortnight ago, which even extended to buying a card of undying love for your cat and - wait for it - one that expressed your cat's undying love for you, I was a bit worried as to what I might find today, the day when traditionally women can pop the question to the man of their dreams.

If you Google the tradition, there are outrageous claims that, in 1288, Queen Margaret of Scotland levied fines if a proposal was refused by a man. It's worth noting that she was aged five and in Norway at the time! It's more likely to be a 19th-century convention.

In the event, there was nothing in the card shop to aid the ladies' proposals. Instead, I reflected on February 29th from a Christian point of view, and concluded that Jesus - an eligible single man himself - might actually have liked the idea of it: and if he likes it, so should we.

How did I arrive at this conclusion? Two reasons.

Firstly, the basic idea is that, once every four years, you can turn conventions upside-down. Women don't have to wait for a proposal: they can seize the initiative. Jesus made a profession of turning conventions upside down.

Look at the [Beatitudes](#)^{*}, where the normal order is reversed and it's the poor, weak and vulnerable who are blessed. Look at those he chose as disciples. Look at the folk he healed and ate with. Look at the incident in the Temple, where he literally turned the tables on the traders. I think that February 29th gives us a nudge to challenge conventions and traditions where they are not in the interests of human beings.

In light of the Occupy protests outside St Paul's in London, we might be aware that we can't singlehandedly overturn unjust conventions. But could there be something we can do today which could challenge conventions when we seem trapped by rules for rules' sake? For instance, if we notice something in town at lunchtime, such as lack of Fairtrade goods or inappropriate clothes for young girls, do we simply shrug and accept, or could we challenge? If we find ourselves saying, "It can't be done because we always do it this way," is that really true?

Sometimes we need to question conventions. There are one or two impenetrable conventions within the Church of England, I am told!

Secondly, I think Jesus would like February 29th because it gives all people the opportunity to express God-given love to the person they would like to spend the rest of their life with. Expressing love can feel cheesy or awkward, or that the timing is wrong; but for all of us, there are those we haven't told how much we value and appreciate them. Sometimes it's too late and we don't get the chance.

I well remember my doctorate supervisor influencing my studies more than anyone else, including my decision to be ordained. I thought Colin, in his mid-50s at the time, was just 'there' and would be for many years to come. But he abruptly had a heart attack and died at his desk before I had a chance to express my gratitude.

Fifteen years later, I still wish I'd thanked him and told him what a difference he'd made. February 29th gives us a nudge to tell the folk who matter to us that they really do, and that doesn't have to be in a romantic way

Leap days don't come round very often. Make this a good one!

Stella

[*www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5&version=NKJV](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5&version=NKJV)