


Reading the resurrection appearance at the lakeside through lenses of sensing and intuition



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This study forms part of a research project designed to test the sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking (SIFT) approach to biblical hermeneutics in respect of a wide range of biblical passages. On this occasion, two contrasting approaches to perceiving (a group of eight sensing types and a group of nine intuitive types) were invited to address two questions to John 21:1–12a: What do you see in this passage? What sparks your imagination in this passage? These two contrasting groups generated characteristically different readings of the same text.

Contribution: The SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics is rooted in the reader-perspective school of interpretation and is concerned with identifying the influence of the psychological type profile of the reader on the interpretation of text. The present study adds to a developing body of evidence validating the theory underpinning the SIFT approach and does so by focusing for the first time on the resurrection appearance at the lakeside in John 21.

Keywords: SIFT approach; psychology and Bible; perceiving process; psychological type; sensing; intuition.

Introduction

Among the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus within the four canonical Gospels, the appearance at the lakeside in John 21 poses its own set of intriguing questions. The first question concerns its relation with the rest of John's Gospel. While, on the one hand, the closing verse of the previous chapter (Jn 20:25) provides a fitting close to the Gospel, there is little evidence among surviving manuscripts to support the view that an early copy of the Gospel was in circulation without this chapter. Moreover, arguments based on stylistic evidence are divided. The second question concerns the relation between the post-resurrection appearance in John's Gospel and the preface to the call of the first disciples in Luke's Gospel. Has John repurposed a pre-existing narrative to shape a post-resurrection appearance, or has Luke repurposed a post-resurrection narrative to address the key question raised by Mark's call of the first four disciples: what on earth motivated them to follow Jesus?

In the Lucan year of the 3-year lectionary, John 21:1–19 is appointed for the Gospel reading at the principle service on the Third Sunday of Easter. With that in mind, the present study was established to explore how one group of engaged churchgoers read and interpreted that passage in the week following Easter Sunday. The study itself was set within the context of an ongoing programme of research designed to test the sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking (SIFT) approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching, as discussed by Francis and Village (2008). The SIFT approach is rooted in the reader-perspective understanding of hermeneutical theories and draws on the psychological model of the human psyche proposed by Jung (1971) and generally known as psychological type theory. Psychological type theory distinguishes between two core processes concerned with perceiving and with judging. The perceiving process distinguishes between two ways of seeing the world or gathering information, styled sensing and intuition. The judging process distinguishes between two ways of evaluating or making judgements about what is thus perceived, styled thinking and feeling.

Psychological type theory suggests that all four functions are core to successful human functioning, but that each individual displays preference for one perceiving function over the

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Note: Historical Thought and Source Interpretation.

other (either sensing or intuition) and for one judging function over the other (either thinking or feeling). The SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching recognises that these psychological type preferences are reflected in distinctive ways for reading and proclaiming scripture. The scientific programme of research designed to test this theory has conducted a series of studies in which participants have been assigned to different groups according to their psychological type preferences and invited to explore the same passage of scripture. The processes and conversations within these groups have been carefully documented and analysed, as evidence in studies reported by Francis (2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015, 2017), Francis and ap Siôn (2016a, 2016b, 2017) Francis and Jones (2011, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2022), Francis, Jones and Hebden (2019), Francis, Jones and Martinson (2019), Francis, Jones and Ross (2020), Francis, McKenna and Sahin (2018, 2020), Francis and Ross (2018, 2022), Francis and Smith (2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018), Francis, Smith and Francis-Dehqani (2017), Francis, Smith and Corio (2018), Francis, Smith and Francis-Dehqani (2018), Francis, Smith and Evans (2021), Francis, Smith and Astley (2022a, 2022b), Francis, Strathie and Ross (2019), Jones and Francis (2019) and Smith and Francis (2016).

Passages from the Old Testament covered by this scientific programme of research include Isaiah 49–50 and Psalms 1, 73, 93 and 139. Passages from Matthew include 2:13–20 (birth narrative), 6:25–30 (lilies of the field and birds of the air), 18:10–14 (the lost sheep), 18:15–18 (binding and loosing on earth), 20:1–15 (laborers in the vineyard), 25:31–41 (separating sheep from goats), 27:3–10 (Judas), 27:19–25 (Pilate) and 28:1–15 (resurrection narrative). Passages from Mark include 1:2–8 (John the Baptist), 2:1–12 (healing), 6:6b–17 (missionary journey), 6:34–44 (feeding of the five thousand), 10:46–52 (healing of blind Bartimaeus), 11:11–21 (cleansing of the temple and incident of the fig tree) and 16:1–8 (resurrection narrative). Passages from Luke include 2:8–16 (birth narrative), 3:2b–20 (John the Baptist), 5:1–17 (call of the first disciples) and 24:13–35 (Road to Emmaus). Passages from John include 6:4–22 (feeding of the five thousand), 13:2b–15 (foot washing) and 18:33–37 (dialogue with Pilate). Passages from The Acts of the Apostles include 8:26–40 (Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch).

Research problem

Against this background, the aim of the present study was to work with a group of participants who had previously engaged neither with psychological type theory nor with the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics to explore a passage of scripture on which research had not been previously published. The group of participants were members of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship attending the annual low weekend conference during April 2022. The passage of scripture chosen for exploration was part of the Gospel reading appointed by the Revised

Common Lectionary for the following Sunday (the Third Sunday of Easter): John 21:1–12a. This portion of the reading was selected because it contains material rich to engage the perceiving process and consequently biblical interpretation workshops were focused on the perceiving process.

Method

Procedure

When participants arrived on the Friday afternoon for the Low Week retreat, they were invited to complete a copy of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley 1985). Before receiving feedback from their responses, the participants were introduced to psychological type theory and invited to make a self-assessment of their type preferences. Then they were invited to dialogue between their self-assessment and their scores recorded on the indicator. For the biblical interpretation workshops, the participants were arranged in three groups according to their preferences on the perceiving process: eight clearly defined sensing types, nine clearly defined intuitive types and five participants with less clearly defined preference. These three groups were invited to read and to reflect on John 21:1–12a that had been presented on a worksheet from the *New Revised Standard Version*. They were also given the following instructions: Agree on a volunteer to feed back to the plenary session on how the group worked together and a summary of what was said. The two tasks are: What do you see in this passage? What sparks your imagination in this passage?

Analysis

The data presented for analysis from this study were drawn from two groups: those who expressed clear preference for sensing, and those who expressed clear preference for intuition. The third group comprised those who occupied the middle territory and were fully engaged in the process but were not observed by the authors and are not included in the analyses. One of the author's served as a non-participant observer within the group of sensing types and the other author served as a non-participant observer within the group of intuitive types, in order to take detailed notes of the discussion and of the process. The feedback given to the plenary session was also noted by the observers. The results section of the article presents a summary of the notes taken in this way. Both observers have been professionally trained in psychological type theory.

Results

Sensing types

The group of eight sensing types was hesitant to begin the task and they sat in silence for a minute or two. Suddenly, Toby said that he would take notes and provide the feedback to the plenary session, but the task at hand was not clarified or revisited. After another pause, Ben began by saying that

the first thing he had noticed in the passage was the charcoal fire, which he thought was a clear reference to St Peter's denial, recorded earlier in the same Gospel. Derek then wondered about the importance of the seven disciples and the group began reciting names of the disciples trying to figure out who was there and who was missing.

Mabel joined the conversation reciting all the disciples' names and then took the conversation in a different direction commenting on the significance of the 153 fish caught. What did they symbolise? Was it the nations of the World? Toby interjected that there is also a theory where 10 equals the number of commandments, and 7 being a significant holy number in scripture, if you add up all the numbers from 1 to 17 (1 + 2 + 3, etc.) then you total 153. But ultimately it is down to which commentary you read last as to what you think the 153 is all about.

Mabel agreed and moved the conversation on again, the last commentary she had read pointed out that St Peter was almost immediately out of the boat as soon as he realised it was the Lord. Sue entered the conversation now, asking if Simon Peter getting out of the boat is linked to another story? Toby suggested that it is the same story found in the synoptics, but lots of the details are different between those accounts and this passage. James added that John is making a theological point in his Gospel, which led Toby to reply, what is significant about the net not being torn? The group mused on this detail of the un-torn net, Derek suggesting it is an image of inclusivity, and Sue that everyone is here, all in the net. Mabel suggested yet another possibility for the 153 fish, that they represented the known species of fish at that time, another symbol that everyone was included in the net.

There was a short pause, after which Toby asked the group if there was something about the right side [of the boat]? Adding that in his sermons on this passage he always ponders why a carpenter is teaching fishermen how to fish! People laughed. He then added, I then lead them to the missional understanding of fishing for people. Mabel interjected that Jesus could see the shoal of fish from his vantage point on the shore, which was why Jesus was able to tell them to cast out the net to the other side, where they caught the fish. The group did not pursue this line of enquiry any further, and there was a moment of stillness. Derek then asked why was Simon Peter naked? Which took the group a little by surprise. Hannah replied that it was a sensible idea, when doing that kind of work, which was hot and sweaty and Toby recalled that in Genesis, Adam and Eve cover up when they saw the Lord in the Garden. Mabel asked, what do we mean by naked anyway? You see naked workman working outside all of the time, and we describe them as naked but it is only their top half that is naked. Toby brought this part of the conversation to a close as he quipped, well they were not wearing much anyway.

What about the breakfast? Toby asked the others. There is the physicality of it, Jesus cooking breakfast, this idea that he is

not a ghost, but that he has changed in some way, not the same, but here he is present with them. The group agreed with Toby about the importance of this action in the narrative, Sue agreed, the demonstration that the risen Jesus eats fish underlines the fact that he is changed yet the same. Sue further wondered if this then turned into a meal?

The sensing group at this point checked out with each other whether they were actually doing what was required of them as a group responding to the text, and Toby in particular was concerned that they had not got the big message of the passage, which of their observations was the one fact that was above all the others? This provided a catalyst for Hannah. For her the message of this passage, was that in their failure the disciples return to something that they knew, being fishermen and Jesus comes and turns that reality on its head. Mabel interjected, he calls them Children does he not? And Toby added, it was lads in some translations. Hannah continued her thought, so no matter how far you stray you are always welcomed by the risen Christ.

Suddenly, Ben, who had been very quiet since the conversation began, recalled when travelling in Scotland there was a phrase that gave you both the sense of how someone was feeling as well as what they perceived. The group could not recall together what this might have been but were intrigued by his comment. Jo, spoke for the first time, bringing the groups attention back to a theme they had discussed earlier, Jo had always been puzzled by the 153 fish, because, to her, it did not actually seem to be that many. Toby quipped, it is a great deal more than they had the first time! The group laughed. Mabel wondered about the fish, so many, yet Peter hauled it in by himself. Toby then asked if we can be too literal in our reading, asking that if it is a symbol of universality then it is about all being included.

The group again paused their conversation and asked one another if they needed to separate out the tasks or answer them both together. The group task was read out aloud again by Toby, what do you see in this passage, what sparks your imagination in this passage? Sue suggested that the group has done the first of those but not really the second.

There was another pause, until Sue posited that if the disciples really believed they would not have returned to fishing. Hannah suggested that this is what happens when people are suffering with grief, that they return to the familiar, the routine and mundane tasks that they know.

Mabel noticed that the disciple whom Jesus loved is not included in the passage. The group looked at the disciples who were there and began to wonder who was missing. Mabel listed all of the disciples to help the group. Toby noted that not all of the disciples were fishermen of course. Jo then asked about the text, when it says we will go with you, who is the 'we'? The six disciples say to Simon Peter we will go with you, suggested Sue. So are we to assume they were also fishermen asked Mabel, in reply Hannah wondered if it was possible they just went along for the ride, in which case,

added Toby, no wonder they did not catch anything! Toby continued, noting that there is quite a lot going on here in this text, especially as a post-resurrection narrative, many of the others are simply conversations.

James then asked the group that if John's Gospel is about signs, whether there is a sign here? Toby saw the charcoal fire as representing Peter's denial. Derek noted that we started with that at the very beginning. Toby continued that in the fourth Gospel Simon Peter features so much, where as in the Synoptics he does not.

Sensing that time is running out, Sue asks what has sparked our imagination? Mabel instantly replies that it is probably the fish. James wants to know whether this is because the group likes facts, that they are drawn to the detail of the 153 fish and want to understand what it means?

Toby tries to sum up some of their conversation, are we saying the big message is to cast your net out to the other side? Or can we not reduce this passage down? Hannah suggests a different big message, is it that the passage is about Jesus transforming the disciples again? Mabel returned to the 153 fish, noting that there must have been many sermons on the subject, but James thought that this did the Gospel a disservice to reduce this passage down to simply explaining that one image. Eventually Sue asked the group that if they had to retell this story in a sentence what would it be? They had not caught anything until they were prepared to let the net down on the other side, said Hannah.

The group's allotted time had come to an end, but their conversations continued as people returned to share with the other groups.

Intuitive types

The group of nine intuitive types sat in silence for several minutes. No one stepped forward to clarify the task or to agree on a volunteer to feedback to the plenary session. Then suddenly Matthew jumped in with his interpretation of the passage. For Matthew the passage was about the twin sacraments of baptism and eucharist. In line with baptismal practice in the early Church, Peter was donning his baptismal robes prior to baptism by full immersion. Matthew also recalled that Jesus already had by the charcoal fire the eucharistic bread waiting for the fish. Matthew linked this bread with the bread that was already waiting for the eucharistic feast on the road to Emmaus.

Matthew's reference to the baptismal robe sparked a different train of thought in Debbie's mind. Debbie had not read the narrative in that way. Debbie had seen Peter putting his clothes on because he was expecting to jump from the boat and to walk across the sea to meet Jesus, just as he had been invited to do once before. There would have been no point in Peter getting dressed if he was about to jump straight into the sea.

This conversation about the significance of Peter getting dressed sparked further speculation about why he was naked in the first place. Was it customary for fishermen to work in the nude, wondered Martin, were all seven of them naked, or only Peter?

At this point, George stepped into the conversation and pointed out that the group had failed to appoint a spokesperson. Immediately Matthew volunteered George for the job and George's protestations went unheard. Still the group had not noticed the two tasks.

Christopher had continued thinking about the baptismal imagery, something that had not occurred to him before. But what really fascinated Christopher was the connection between this passage and the call of the first disciples as reported in Luke 5. Christopher wondered whether Luke had placed the catch of fish in the original location, and John had adapted it to become a post-resurrection appearance. Or had John got the location right as a post-resurrection appearance and Luke repurposed the passage to explain why those first disciples had been so eager to leave their boats behind and to follow Jesus.

Now that he had been tasked as notetaker, George jumped in stating a different starting point. George did not see stories like this one as being about a literal and physical resurrection. Had Jesus been literally raised from the dead, his disciples would have recognised him. The same is true about Mary Magdalene. She mistook him initially to be the gardener. Rather George saw this story to be about how the early Church makes sense of the continuity of Jesus' work after his crucifixion. Here the seven disciples recognised the continuity of Jesus' teaching, values and expectations when they met around the eucharist and the bread was shared. They continue to do what Jesus had done. George found it easier to comprehend that the resurrection was through the Church, expressed through the eucharist and in collective activities.

George's non-literal interpretation of this resurrection appearance propelled Luke to offer a more orthodox explanation. For Luke, Jesus was expressing himself for a limited time of 40 days as a literal presence, long enough for his followers to have seen him and to have been convinced by the resurrection. Then after 40 days Jesus ascended because he no longer had need to go on convincing them.

Possibly feeling that this could be a somewhat futile debate, Frank turned attention to the way in which the disciple whom Jesus loved recognised Jesus. For him, the passage raised the wider theme regarding how we recognise Jesus. Seeking a different starting place. Robert drew attention to how the whole event started with Peter suggesting to the others what they should do. They have no other ideas, so they join him. Apart from the sons of Zebedee, we have no idea whether or not the others had been fishermen.

Fred took us back to the debate about how to read the story. Fred was not too much worried about the detail. For him, this is an inspiring story that catches his imagination and points to ways in which Jesus continues to be recognised into the future. Christopher picked up on this idea. He, too, cannot be worried by the detail but sees this story as a good example of not making separation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Christopher had been reminded of watching a video about this passage that had gone into great detail to explain the significance of the 153 fish. Christopher himself could not care less about this detail. At this point, Frank was keen to push back to the significance of the story for exploring how we recognised Jesus. For Frank the key theme was this, 'Ultimately what are the triggers of recognition for us?'

Fred had not been listening to the question and pushed off in a different direction. The thing that had caught Fred's attention was the charcoal fire. Only once before in John's Gospel had there been reference to a charcoal fire, and that was in chapter 18. There Peter was warming himself by the charcoal fire when he denied he knew Jesus. Here the reappearance of the charcoal fire sets the context for the restoration of Peter after they had finished breakfast later in chapter 21.

George wanted to get the conversation refocused on Frank's question about the triggers of recognition that work for us. Matthew wondered if he could illuminate the question with a little autobiographical reflection. When he came to faith as an adult in his twenties, he began to search for a church. His first step was a high church Anglican church that he found as cold as ice. His second step was a URC church where there were no people of his age. His third step was a Methodist church where the invitation 'If you love the Lord you are welcome to the table' touched his heart, and there he stayed.

Christopher followed Matthew's example of autobiographical reflection and pointed out how his church had responded to his distress concerning his mother's life-threatening illness simply by carrying on sustaining the things with which he was familiar. This made him think differently about Peter's decision to go back fishing. Was Peter processing his grief and doing so by 'keeping things normal'?

Conscious that he would soon need to report back, George asked for clarity and consensus to be distilled from the wide-ranging conversation. Christopher jumped in quickly to say that there was no consensus, 'What we have found here is a multi-layered passage like a stack of pancakes'. So, at this point Frank decided to throw another pancake into the stack. 'Is there anywhere else Jesus calls the disciples children?' he asked. That immediately triggered Debbie into wondering whether the term 'children' was one of endearment or of criticism. But the group had already overrun by 10 min eating into the 30 min coffee break, and George decided it was high time to stand up and lead the exit.

Discussion

The way in which the two groups (one comprising sensing types, and one comprising intuitive types) worked felt quite different. The mood within the groups of sensing types was characterised by a solid commitment to fathom how the text actually worked, coupled with a sense of frustration when straightforward and reasonable questions failed to find satisfactory answers. The mood within the group of intuitive types was characterised by enthusiastic sparks of insight and more fallow intervals until new themes caught their imagination. These different moods are indicative of how sensing types and intuitive types set about perceiving text differently. A group of sensing types working in their own way, without the distracting presence of intuitive types, accentuates and makes more visible the distinctive characteristics of the sensing function. A group of intuitive types working in their own way, without the distracting presence of sensing types, accentuates and makes more visible the distinctive characteristics of the intuitive function. These two different perspectives will be discussed in turn and in light of the evidence gathered from the two groups exploring the Johannine account of the resurrection appearance at the lakeside.

Perceiving text through the lens of sensing

Myers (1998) captures the essence of the sensing function in the following way:

People who prefer sensing like to take in information through their eyes, ears and other senses to find out what is actually happening. They are observant of what is going on around them and are especially good at recognising the practical realities of a situation. (p. 4)

According to Francis (2005), sensing types are practical people. This was illustrated by Toby's concern right at the start of the session when he wanted to make sure that notes were taken and that feedback would be prepared. Halfway through the session, the group paused to check whether they were still on task and read out the instructions aloud again.

According to Francis (2005), a core feature that characterises sensing types is their concern for details. This was clearly illustrated when Ben opened the discussion by saying that the first thing he had noticed in the passage was the charcoal fire. Later Toby recalled that there was also a charcoal fire in the story about Peter's denial before the cockcrow. Derek counted up the number of disciples (seven) and wanted to fill in the details of who were missing. Mabel noticed that the disciple whom Jesus loved was not included in the passage. Mabel fixed on the details of 153 fish and wanted to uncover the significance of that number. She was puzzled how Peter managed to land so many fish by himself. Jo was puzzled by how small the catch was. Toby spotted that the net had not been torn. He also spotted that the net had been cast from the right side of the boat. He wanted to know more about why that had been the case. Derek noted that Peter was naked and he wanted to know why. Mabel noticed that Jesus called the

disciples 'children' and wanted to know why. Toby recalled that it was 'lads' in some translations.

According to Francis (2005), sensing types are down to earth people. Toby was attracted to the physicality of Jesus cooking breakfast. Jesus was not a ghost but here present with his disciples. The risen Jesus really eats fish.

According to Francis (2005), sensing types are concerned with the conventional and with connecting with past experiences. Hannah suggested that the disciples had returned to their trade as fishermen, returned to something they knew, coming to terms with Jesus' death. She linked that with her experience that, when people are suffering, they return to the familiar, the routine and mundane tasks that they know.

When it came to the intuitive question, 'What sparks your imagination in this passage?' the group of sensing types struggles. Their answers remained firmly link to the details of the text. Mabel's imagination was sparked by the fish. Toby saw the message of the passage 'to cast your net on the other side'. For Hannah, the message of the passage was that they had not caught anything until they were prepared to let the net down on the other side.

Perceiving the text through the lens of intuition

Myers (1998) captures the essence of the intuitive function in the following way:

People who prefer intuition like to take in information by seeing the big picture, focusing on the relationship and connections between facts. They want to grasp patterns and are especially good at seeing new possibilities and different ways of doing things. (p. 4)

According to Francis (2005), intuitive types are inspirational people who are good at spotting connections and making links. This was clearly illustrated when Matthew opened the discussion by linking the passage with the twin sacraments of baptism and eucharist. When the text said that Peter put on some clothes, Matthew perceived these as baptismal robes prior to baptism by full immersion. When the text said there was bread in the charcoal fire, Matthew perceived this as set out for eucharist. When Debbie read in the text that Peter was putting his clothes on she perceived this as saying that Peter was preparing to jump out of the boat and to walk across the sea to meet Jesus. Participants in the intuitive group were also quick to make links between the passage and their personal experience. George linked the passage to how he came to faith as an adult in his twenties. Christopher linked the passage to the way in which he was processing his own grief concerning his mother's life-threatening illness.

According to Francis (2005), intuitive types are interested in theories. This was illustrated by Christopher's interest in the connection between the post-resurrection narrative and Luke's account of the call of the first disciples. Christopher was fascinated by the two opposing theories. Had Luke got it right and John repurposed the narrative to become a

post-resurrection appearance, or had John got it right and Luke repurposed the narrative to explain why those first disciples were so eager to leave their boats behind and to follow Jesus?

According to Francis (2005), a core feature that characterises intuitive types is their concern for meaning. This is illustrated in the way in which George saw the story to be about how the early Church made sense of the continuity of Jesus' work after his crucifixion. Here the seven disciples recognised the continuity of Jesus' teaching, values and expectations when they met around the eucharist. They continued to do what Jesus had done. Christopher perceived the story as speaking into theories about the connections between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

According to Francis (2005), intuitive types keep an eye on the future and on future possibilities. Looking beyond the constraints of the story, Frank was interested in the wider theme of how we recognise Jesus today. For Fred, too, his interest was not in the details of what had happened in the past, but in how this inspiring story catches his imagination today and how it points to ways in which Jesus continues to be recognised into the future. This same theme caught Frank's imagination. For Frank, the key theme was this, 'Ultimately what are the triggers of recognition for us?'

When it came to the sensing question, 'What do you see in this passage?' the group of intuitive types struggled. Only Fred gave serious attention to a detail and that concerned the charcoal fire, but even here his interest was less in the fire itself than in its capacity to set the context for the restoration of Peter that took place later on in chapter 21. Christopher explicitly ruled out his own interest in the 153 fish.

Conclusion

Working within the context of an ongoing programme of research designed to test the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, the present study built on previous research in three ways. It focused attention on the resurrection appearance at the lakeside in John 21:1-12a; it engaged hermeneutical communities among a group of Methodists not previously familiar with the SIFT approach, and it gave close attention to describing and to analysing the distinctive readings proposed by sensing types and by intuitive types. The data generated by this project contribute to the rich tapestry of studies that cumulatively are supporting the validity of the theory underpinning the SIFT approach. The SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching maintains that each of the four functions (sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking) offers a distinctive and complementary reading of scripture (Francis & Village 2008). Cumulatively, the emerging body of data demonstrates that this is indeed the case. Three implications follow from these findings for practice.

The first implication for practice is that the kind of type-alike workshops arranged for the current research project could play

a key role in church Bible study groups. Organising a church Bible study programme within four type-alike hermeneutical communities could provide opportunities for individuals showing the same psychological type preferences to enrich their personal engagement with scripture. Such a strategy could also raise the awareness of the local church to the rich engagement with scripture as each of the four hermeneutical communities share with each other their discoveries.

The second implication for practice is that church congregations will comprise a rich mix of sensing types, intuitive types, feeling types and thinking types. Each of these types may be bringing with them their own preferences and expectations regarding the interpretation of scripture. These differences among listeners are worth serious consideration by preachers.

The third implication for practice concerns ways in which churches may resource preaching so that the four perspectives of sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking are routinely addressed. One route within churches that have access to a team of preachers is to be aware of the range of psychological type preferences within the team. Another route, as illustrated by Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002), is for individual preachers to train and to develop their own awareness of engaging the four functions within their preaching.

Located within an ongoing programme of research designed to test the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, the present study contributed one further unique contribution to the developing rich tapestry of research findings. It did so by identifying a passage of scripture that had not previously been the subject of exploration by this approach and by working with a specific group of participants who had not previously been engaged with this process. We would wish to invite other researchers to add further enrichment to this tapestry.

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Authors' contributions

L.J.F. took responsibility for overall conceptualisation of the article and for the empirical enquiry. L.J.F. and A.S. analysed and interpreted the data and shaped the article.

Ethical considerations

This study received approval from the School Research Ethics Committee, York St John University HRP-RS-AV-12-20-01.

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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