

Preaching on the revised common lectionary for the feast of Christ the King: Joy for intuitive thinking types, nightmare for sensing feeling types?

**Authors:**Leslie J. Francis^{1,3} Greg Smith^{1,3} Jonathan Evans^{2,3} **Affiliations:**

¹Department of CEDAR, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom

²Parish, Diocese of Winchester, Winchester, United Kingdom

³Department of New Testament Studies and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

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Corresponding author:

Leslie Francis,
leslie.francis@warwick.ac.uk

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This qualitative study was positioned within an emerging scientific field concerned with the interaction between biblical text and the psychological profile of the preacher. The theoretical framework was provided by the sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking (SIFT) approach to biblical hermeneutics, an approach rooted in reader-perspective hermeneutical theory and in Jungian psychological type theory that explores the distinctive readings of sensing perception and intuitive perception, and the distinctive readings of thinking evaluation and feeling evaluation. The empirical methodology was provided by developing a research tradition concerned with applying the SIFT approach to biblical text. In the present study, a group of 17 Anglican clergy were invited to work in psychological type-like groups to explore two of the biblical passages identified by Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary for the Feast of Christ the King. Dividing into three workshops, according to their preferences for sensing and intuition, the clergy explored Psalm 93. Dividing into three workshops, according to their preferences for thinking and feeling, the clergy explored John 18:33–37. The rich data gathered from these workshops supported the hypothesis that biblical interpretation and preaching may be shaped by the reader's psychological type preference and suggested that the passages of scripture proposed for the Feast of Christ the King may be a joy for intuitive thinking types, but a nightmare for sensing feeling types.

Contribution: Situated within the reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics, the SIFT method is concerned with identifying the influence of the psychological type of the reader in shaping the interpretation of text. Employing this method, the present study contributes to the fields of homiletics and hermeneutics by demonstrating how some readers (sensing types) may struggle more than others (intuitive types) to interpret the scripture readings proposed by the lectionary for the Feast of Christ the King.

Keywords: preaching; psychological type; SIFT; empirical theology; reader perspective.

Introduction

The Feast of Christ the King was a late-comer to the liturgical calendar of the Western Church, instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925. The political background to the nuancing of this feast was set by the aftermath of the First World War. In the encyclical *Ubi arcane Dei consilio* of 23 December 1922, Pope Pius XI noted that there had been no real peace following the cessation of hostilities and maintained that true peace can only be found under the Kingship of Christ as 'Prince of Peace'. As Prince of Peace:

Jesus Christ reigns over the minds of individuals by His teachings, in their hearts by His love, and in each one's life by the living according to His law and the imitating of His example. (para. 48)

The Kingship of Christ was addressed by Pope Pius XI again in *Quas primus* (Encyclical on the Feast of Christ the King) of 11 December 1925. In this encyclical, Pope Pius XI affirmed that:

As long as individuals and states refused to submit to the role of our Saviour, there would be no real hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations. Men must look for the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ. (para. 1)

Therefore by Our Apostolic Authority we institute the Feast of the Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ to be observed yearly throughout the whole world on the last Sunday of the month of October – the Sunday, that is, which immediately precedes the Feast of All Saints. (para. 28)

Within the calendar of the Catholic Church, the Feast of Christ the King gained in public significance as major new cathedrals were dedicated to Christ the King, including the Cathedral of Christ the King in Mullingar, County Westmeath, Ireland, dedicated 06 September 1936, and the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, consecrated 14 May 1967.

The current observance of the Feast of Christ the King on the last Sunday of the liturgical year was established in the General Roman Calendar in 1969, and consolidated in the Revised Common Lectionary that is generally also shared by the Anglican Church and some lectionary-oriented Protestant Churches. Against this background, the 3 year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary provides a powerful set of texts for shaping the biblical images associated with the Feast, and such texts may exercise a significant influence on the way in which religious leaders shape their teaching related to this Feast. For example, the three readings identified by the Revised Common Lectionary for Year B (the middle year of the 3 year cycle) for the final Sunday of Ordinary Time are: Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14, Revelation 1:4b–8 and John 8:33–37; together with Psalm 93.

Research aim

Working within the empirical science of biblical hermeneutics, the aim of the present study is to explore how a group of Anglican clergy interpret examples of the lectionary material identified in Year B for the Feast of Christ the King, and the extent to which these passages may stimulate meaningful insights into the significance of the Feast. Added point is given to this research question by framing it within the context of the series of recent empirical studies employing the sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking (SIFT) approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching, one distinctive strand shaped within the broader research-based perspective on hermeneutical theory.

The reader perspective approach recognises that distinctive characteristics of the reader shape the interpretation of the text. One strand of the reader perspective approach has been influenced by sociological theories recognising how the location of the reader influences interpretation (see eds. Segovia & Tolbert 1995a, 1995b). Another strand of the reader perspective approach has been influenced by psychological theories recognising how the psychological structure of the reader influences interpretation. The SIFT approach belongs to this psychological strand (see Francis & Village 2008) and draws specifically on Jungian psychological type theory. Psychological type theory, as originally proposed by Jung (1971) and as subsequently developed by a series of psychometric instruments, including the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates 1978), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley 1985) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis 2005), distinguishes between two core psychological processes, the perceiving process that is concerned with gathering information and the judging process that is concerned with evaluating information.

Jung helpfully described perceiving as the irrational process because it *is not* concerned with evaluation, and judging as the rational process because it *is* concerned with evaluation. The theory suggests that each process is reflected in two contrasting functions. The two perceiving functions are: styled sensing and intuition. The two judging functions are: styled feeling and thinking. Jungian theory suggests that optimal human functioning draws on all four psychological functions: sensing (S), intuition (I), feeling (F) and thinking (T). The SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics argues that rich engagement with the Word of God is enhanced by engagement of all four psychological functions.

In terms of the perceiving functions, sensing types focus on the given evidence of the present situation as perceived by the senses. They tend to be concerned with specific details, rather than the overall picture. They are concerned with the actual, the real and the practical. They tend to be down to earth and matter of fact. Intuitive types focus on the possibilities of the situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. They tend to concentrate on associations, intuitions and the wider themes that go well beyond the sense perceptions. They tend to focus on the bigger picture and on the future possibilities, rather than on specific facts and details.

In terms of the judging functions, feeling types form evaluations based on subjective personal and interpersonal values. They emphasise compassion and mercy. They are known for their tactfulness and for their desire for peace. They are more concerned to provide harmony, than to adhere to abstract principles. Thinking types form evaluations based on objective, impersonal logic; they emphasise integrity and justice. They are known for their truthfulness and for their desire for fairness. They consider conforming to principles to be more important than cultivating harmony.

Psychological type theory and preaching

The connection between psychological type theory and biblical interpretation was first raised insightfully by Stiefel (1992) in an essay concerned with preaching. He argued that preachers who prefer sensing may concentrate on the details of the scripture passage, but fail to engage intuitive types in the congregation. Preachers who prefer intuition may concentrate on the big themes and ideas raised by the scripture passage, but fail to keep the attention of sensing types in the congregation.

Preachers who prefer thinking are likely to focus on theological concepts and to present them with well-ordered clarity, but fail to engage the hearts of feeling types in the congregation. Preachers who prefer feeling are likely to focus on God's relationship with humankind and to emphasise the fellowship and warmth of the Christian community, but fail to engage the minds of thinking types in the congregation.

Independently of the earlier initiatives by Stiefel (1992), Francis (1997) and Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002)

developed the theory underpinning the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching, and tested the capacity of this theory to illuminate the principal Sunday Gospels proposed by the Revised Common Lectionary. Subsequently, Francis and Village (2008) developed more fully the theoretical underpinning for this approach. Building on these theoretical foundations, a rigorous programme of empirical research has set out to test the theory and to document the ways in which individual preferences for sensing, for intuition, for thinking and for feeling are reflected in distinctive readings of scripture.

The basic approach within the programme of empirical research designed to test the SIFT theory of biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching involved inviting participants to explore psychological type theory and to become aware of their own psychological type preferences. Then participants were invited to work in 'type-alike' groups in order to reflect on and to respond to a specific passage of scripture. Two different routes built on different approaches to psychological type theory were used for establishing 'type alike' groups. One route looked at the two psychological processes in turn. First, the participants were divided into groups distinguishing between sensing and intuition where they were invited to explore one text that specifically engages the perceiving process. Then the participants were divided into groups distinguishing between feeling and thinking where they were invited to explore a second text that specifically engages the judging process. In the first study in this series, Francis and Jones (2011) focussed on the resurrection narratives reported in Mark 16:1–8 and Matthew 28:1–15, working with two different groups: 26 ministry training candidates in England, and 21 Anglican clergy and readers in England. In stage one, the participants were divided according to the perceiving process and invited to discuss the Marcan narrative that is rich in material to engage sensing and intuition. In stage two, the participants were divided according to the judging process and invited to discuss the Matthean narrative that is rich in issues to engage feeling and thinking.

The second route looked at the four psychological functions at the same time. In this context, the participants were divided into groups defined by their dominant psychological type preference, distinguishing between dominant sensing types, dominant intuitive types, dominant feeling types and dominant thinking types. In the first study in this series, Francis (2010) focussed on the feeding of the 5000 reported in Mark 6:34–44, working with two different groups: 24 licensed readers in England, and 22 licensed clergy in Northern Ireland. Within these dominant type groups, the participants were invited to prepare a presentation on the text (Mk 6:34–44).

Following these two routes a range of studies have now been published exploring the following passages of scripture: the Feeding of the 5000 reported in Mark 6:34–44 (Francis 2010); the resurrection narratives reported in Mark 16:1–8 and Matthew 28:1–15 (Francis & Jones 2011); the cleansing of the Temple and the incident of the fig tree reported in Mark

11:11–21 (Francis 2012a; Francis & ap Siôn 2016b); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6:4–22 (Francis 2012b); the narrative of separating sheep from goats reported in Matthew 25:31–46 (Francis & Smith 2012); the birth narratives reported in Matthew 2:13–20 and Luke 2:8–16 (Francis & Smith 2013); two narratives concerning John the Baptist reported in Mark 1:2–8 and Luke 3:2b–20 (Francis 2013; Francis & Smith 2014); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6:5–15 (Francis & Jones 2014); two passages from Mark exploring different aspects of discipleship reported in Mark 6:7–14 and Mark 6:33–41 (Francis & Jones 2015a); the foot washing account reported in John 13:2b–15 (Francis 2015); two healing narratives reported in Mark 2:1–12 and Mark 10:46–52 (Francis & Jones 2015b); the narrative of blind Bartimaeus reported in Mark 10:46–52 (Smith & Francis 2016), the Road to Emmaus narrative reported in Luke 24:13–35 (Francis & ap Siôn 2016a; Francis & Smith 2017), the call of the first disciples as recorded in Luke 5:1–7 (Francis & ap Siôn 2017), the missionary journey of the disciples in Mark 6:6b–17 (Francis, Smith & Francis-Dehqani 2017); the Matthean pericopes on Pilate and Judas in Matthew 27:3–10, 19–25 (Francis & Ross 2018); the account of the Baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:4–9 (Francis, Jones & Hebden 2019); the search for the lost sheep in Matthew 18:10–14 (Jones & Francis 2019) and the teaching about binding and loosing on earth in Matthew 18:15–18 (Francis, Jones & Martinson 2019). Recently this research tradition has been applied to the suffering servant passages from Isaiah 49 and 50 (Francis 2017) and to the Psalms: Psalm 1 (Francis, McKenna & Sahin 2018; Francis & Smith 2018), Psalm 139 (Francis, Smith & Corio 2018) and Psalm 73 (Francis, Jones & Ross 2020; Francis, McKenna & Sahin 2020). This research tradition has also been discussed in Poland by Chaim (2013, 2014, 2015).

Research question

Building on this tradition of qualitative studies designed to explore the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, the research question addressed by the present study was sharpened to identify two of the four passages of scripture appointed by Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary for the Feast of Christ the King most appropriate for distinguishing between engaging the perceiving process and engaging the judging process. Psalm 93 was selected because it is rich in content relevant to the perceiving process (sensing and intuition). John 18:33–37 was selected because it is rich in content relevant to the judging process (thinking and feeling).

Method

Procedure

Following an introduction to the theology of individual differences and to psychological type theory, the group of eight first year curates and seven training incumbents serving in one diocese within the Church of England were invited to complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Form G (Myers & McCaulley 1985) and to select their best fit on the two preferences between sensing or intuition and between thinking or feeling.

In the first instance three groups were formed distinguishing amongst those who expressed a clear preference for sensing, those who expressed a clear preference for intuition and those who positioned themselves in the middle territory. In the second instance, three groups were formed distinguishing amongst those who expressed a preference for thinking, those who expressed a strong preference for feeling and those who expressed a less strong preference for feeling, together with one low-scoring thinking type.

The groups organised according to the perceiving process (sensing and intuition) were given a worksheet on which there was a printed copy of Psalm 93 and the invitation to address the following four questions: How do you perceive this passage? What engages your sensing function? What engages your intuitive function? What would you preach on? The groups organised according to the judging process (feeling and thinking) were given a worksheet on which there was a printed copy of John 18:33–37 and the invitation to address the following four questions: How do you evaluate this passage? What engages your feeling function? What engages your thinking function? What would you preach on?

Analysis

One of the authors served as non-participant observer within each group in order to take detailed notes of the process and the discussion. The observers also noted the feedback given by the group to the plenary session. The results section of this article presents a summary of the notes taken in these contexts.

Results: Psalm 93 and the perceiving process

Intuition

The group of six high-scoring intuitive types (51, 45, 39, 37, 35, 21) seemed to relish the opportunity to reflect on Psalm 93. They settled to the task quickly. One member of the group volunteered to take notes and to provide feedback. Then the group fell into silence as all five members of the group read the passage silently for themselves. The silence was broken by one participant exclaiming, 'I think this is a fantastic Psalm, especially the middle part: the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring'. The second participant noted that the Psalm opened with the theme of majesty. The whole Psalm is about majesty. The word 'majesty' is used three times. The flood points to majesty. The word 'flood' is used three times. The third participant felt less comfortable about the notion of flood. Flood did not speak to her of majesty, but of disaster. Flood is not a positive image. Flood speaks of destruction. Flood speaks of chaos, opposed to God's creativity and majesty. Recent flooding on the Salisbury Plain destroyed people's homes and livelihoods.

The contradictory images flowing from flood stimulated further conversation. For some, the Psalm spoke of the life-giving waters fertilising the rich land around the Nile, or of life-giving aspect of God's generous creation. For some, the

roaring of the floods were lifting up praise to the exalted God. For others, the floods were roaring in defiance of God.

Repositioning the Psalm within the worldview of ancient Israel, some saw the three stanzas of the Psalm as celebrating God's majesty and creativity (stanza one), the forces of chaos roaring against God (stanza two), God's majesty reaffirmed against the chaos (stanza three). This analysis did not secure consensus, because some saw the middle stanza not as roaring against God, but rather as providing a foil against which God's majesty could be scaled. God's majesty was even greater than the roaring floods. Here the flood profiled the terrifying, awesome majesty of God. It is this overwhelming image of majesty that gave one member of the group a real sense of thrill.

The notion of a sense of thrill sets the conversation off in a new direction. The Psalm spoke of strength of feeling. It evoked the roar of crashing sound, the overwhelming power of complete and utter darkness. For one member of the group it raised the poignant question, 'What would I feel in that place of terrifying majesty?'

This powerful question drew several answers from the group. One woman reflected on the way in which each member of the group had read the Psalm silently and formed his or her own inward response. For her the Psalm had not been written for private reflection, but for public performance. The mention of public performance sparked an interest in how they would preach on the passage. One member of the group considered that she would want to create an experience for the congregation, drawing on lighting effects, on sound effects and on smells. For another member of the group, this train of thought sparked recollection of the last scene of the film *Titanic*, with water pouring into the hold. For another, the conversation evoked images of Shakespeare's Caliban and *The Tempest*. Intuition was enjoying a field day with images. Another member of the group considered that he would want to show a video clip of a major storm or tsunami. For him this would raise the question, 'Where is God in all this? How can we hang onto the God of love in the midst of all this chaos?'

These extravagant images of performance also generated a voice of caution. One member of the group had seen so many naff things performed in church that she preferred to invite members of the congregation to form their own images or to draw on their previous experiences that evoked a sense of majesty, say a majestic sunset on the horizon of a calm sea, or a boat trip by the majestic Niagara Falls. Another member of the group drew the conversation back to the less positive side of the image of flood. Imagine the time when the flood was over your head, and when you were drawn down into the valley of the shadow of death. Was not the majesty of God there in the flood and in the chaos?

Time was running out and members of the group had spotted other images and other ideas that they wanted to add to the conversation. The last stanza offers the notion of God as

a household, of God ordering and holding the world as a household. In this stanza, holiness is about things being in the right place and people being in the right relationships with each other and with God. Here is an image of order coming out of disorder in the household of God. For others, however, the line 'holiness befits your house... for evermore' spoke of the Temple in Jerusalem, or of the lineage (or house) of David the King. For another, the image evoked the teaching of Jesus that the wise man built his house upon the rock. Now that image quickly sparked the words, the melody and the actions of a well-established chorus for children. But time really had run out before this performance could commence.

Reflecting on the outcome of the workshop, this group of high-scoring intuitive types went away feeling energised by their imaginative creativity and feeling better equipped to preach on Psalm 93; here was a Psalm rich in images that would resource their preaching on the last Sunday of the lectionary year, on the theme of Christ the King.

Sensing

The group of four relatively high-scoring sensing types (21, 25, 27, 33) set about the task in methodical fashion. The first decision was to appoint a note-taker and then a different individual to speak to the notes in the plenary session. The note-taker's first action was to trace a four-segment grid on a piece of flip chart paper, labelling sections variously 'perceiving', 'sensing', 'intuition' and 'preaching'. Following the group's second action, which was to read the Psalm aloud, they immediately progressed to question one: How do you perceive this passage? The first answer posited was Power. This was soon developed by reference to the repetition found in the Psalm of the word 'majesty'. Having made straightforward progress to this juncture, all but one of the group participant began to agonise over their inability to grasp what was meant by the word 'perceive' and whether they themselves were sensing types, and if so what the implications might be. A repeated refrain throughout was 'I don't know', spoken with varying degrees of pain and frustration.

The impasse was resolved when they realised that the fourth question (How would you preach on this passage) was one that they did understand and could answer. Nevertheless, defining terms remained paramount. Noticing that the worksheet was headed 'Christ the King', some in the group wanted to define this term before exploring how Psalm 93 might illuminate it. One member of the group suggested that Christ the King was seated at the right hand of God; and therefore he would seek in preaching to find phrases in the verses of the Psalm that emphasised or illuminated this.

Despite this helpful entry point, the majority of the participants in the group still wanted to bemoan how the Psalmist seemed to be attempting to describe something that was beyond words, the indescribable. These sensing types struggled to cash in poetic imagery in ways that were accessible to them. One participant, struggling with this

theme of Christ the King, opined that she would preach on not putting God in a box. Meanwhile, another participant was still attempting to engage with the task of relating to Psalm 93, noting that the repetition of the word 'robed' appealed to the sensing function. Another participant referenced the adjectives used by the Psalmist, specifically mentioning 'roaring'. There followed a brief, but unsuccessful attempt to reference other Psalms. This, however, triggered the recognition in the group that any service in which this Psalm featured as the text for the sermon would have to be coherent throughout, ensuring liturgy and music choices all fit. Developing this thought as to how a service might look in which Psalm 93 was central, one participant wanted to show a film; and when another doubted that she would understand what the visual display was supposed to signify, added that Psalm 93 could be read over it. The objector confidently asserted that she would not make the connections.

The group, which by this time had barely referenced the text in the first place, now abandoned it altogether for a discussion on the mechanics of preaching. The first contribution expressed a preference for reading many commentaries for inspiration; whilst a second contribution asserted the need to read the text again and again over a period of several days. At this point, the group evidenced a degree of self-awareness, recognising how they had solved the dilemma presented by the task by going to the practical, the concrete challenge of preaching. Another agreed, asserting the importance of the 'tangible'. One participant, warming to the theme, said she would invariably want to preach a practical sermon, focussing on the application. Another participant spoke of always preaching on 'alternative realities', making tangible, visible what cannot be seen now.

There followed the first of three silences, each longer and less productive than the one before. Continuing to ignore Psalm 93, the group identified that Christ the King was celebrated on 25 November this year, and wondered whether they might use the ideas they had generated. This engendered a further practical discussion: should they use Psalms more often for preaching; how easy would it be to change the reading; how much resistance might they encounter in their parishes to doing something different; how much notice would the person operating the AV system need if the readings or liturgy were to be changed? This prompted the additional reflection that it took as long to plan a service as it did to write a sermon. The group continued to discuss their own contexts and the challenges they presented before one of them called time.

The participants in the group of high-scoring sensing types had not enjoyed the workshop. They had found the invitation to draw on the imagery of Psalm 93 to resource a sermon on Christ the King frustrating and unfruitful.

Sensing and intuition

The third group of seven participants drew together lower-scoring sensing types with lower-scoring intuitive types,

allowing both preferences to work together. These participants began by scanning the worksheet that they had been given, noticing both the text of the Psalm and the four questions. Then one participant offered to read Psalm 93 aloud. Following the reading of the Psalm, there was a short pause, quickly broken by an intuitive member of the group taking control of the process by focussing attention on the questions and by making sure that the group got something written down for the purpose of giving feedback to the plenary session.

With that organisational matter in place, there was a good discussion about responses to the Psalm. The discussion was free-flowing and easy, with both intuitive types and sensing types contributing and seeming comfortable in doing so. A range of thoughts and observations were offered, initially without consideration of whether these thoughts and observations were the product of sensing preferences or intuitive preferences. Having generated and noted a range of thoughts and observations, the individual who had taken control of the group invited categorising these thoughts and observations into examples of sensing and intuitive preferences.

The method of categorisation adopted exemplified an intuitive way of doing things. 'Bubbles' were drawn on each of the two categories, with arrows flowing out from the bubbles to text spread around the remainder of the page. An intuitive member of the group saw this as a 'mind map'. A sensing member of the group found this annoyingly messy and would have preferred a more orderly method of recording, such as a grid or vertical division under subheadings. This sensing member of the group later recognised in the plenary session that his preference had been exemplified by the group of higher-scoring sensing types.

When this sensing member of the group had reorganised the thoughts and observations about Psalm 93, he had produced three blocks of material: distinguishing amongst sensing-type observations, intuitive-type observations and ideas for preaching. Sensing-type observations about Psalm 93 included:

- The formal structure of the Psalm – division into three stanzas; the parallelism and repetition of key words and ideas.
- The sequencing of ideas as the Psalm progresses – majesty, permanence, awe or power, law, holiness.
- The slight awkwardness of the language in the English text in the final stanza prompted questions about what the original Hebrew text said and whether other translations might shed further light on the Psalmist's meaning here.
- The sensing-style development of an argument from an aesthetic description of God to an ethical injunction: if God is like this (majestic, permanent, awesome, covenantal, holy), then we need to be covenant-obedient and holy in order to dwell in God's house.

Intuitive-type observations about Psalm 93 included:

- Reflection on the sensory imagery, visual and auditory, that sparked the imagination (robes, throne, waves or storm).
- Making a link to Psalm 23 through the reference to God's house and the idea of our dwelling in that house for ever, bringing our own relationship to God into play.
- Comparing the use of flood imagery in the Psalm to current associations of flood as destructive and malign, pondering how the use of this imagery worked in support of the majesty and awe of God.
- Recalling other flood imagery in visual art – memories triggered by the imagery in the Psalm.
- Thinking about covenant theology – the hope of giving and receiving, triggered by the ideas in the last stanza, which made us think of hope and opportunity.

Preaching ideas included the following, none of which specifically related to Christ the King:

- The idea of God as stability amidst instability, relating this to the present domestic and international political situation.
- The injunction to personal holiness and covenant obedience in the face of a majestic and strong God, who has given us his covenant promise and whose house we may enter.

The experience of this group that brought together low-scoring intuitive types and low-scoring sensing types illustrated how collaboration between the two type preferences could both generate stimulating insights from biblical interpretation and good foundations for liturgical preaching.

Results: John 18:33–37 and the judging process

Thinking

The group of six thinking types (scores of 47, 43, 29, 27, 25, 21) began their session by appointing someone to take notes and to provide feedback to the plenary session, and by analysing the task in front of them: they were preparing to preach on Christ the King. The passage was read aloud and the first participant jumped straight in. He argued that justice was important to the way in which he saw things, and as a consequence of that he could relate to Pilate. He saw Pilate as a fair person, and as someone who was asking Jesus fair questions. He saw Pilate as trying to get to the truth of the matter.

This view was far from satisfactory for the second participant who saw this as a far too superficial analysis of the Johannine text, 'I do not home in on Pilate as an individual. I home in on a complex play with a theological plot, with an eschatological end game'. This play is a game of wit. In that game some important things are evoked to set the scene for what is to come. John's distinctive style of writing is full of irony, full of word play. What we see here is a power play of words between Pilate and Jesus. Then followed an analysis of power and of linguistic ambiguity as Pilate and Jesus were speaking of very different kinds of kingship.

The first participant to speak was neither convinced by nor content with this analysis of the Johannine narrative: 'I think Pilate acts fairly with his handling of the crowd. I am sympathetic with Pilate's handling of the case'. This support for Pilate annoyed another participant who evaluated Pilate very differently. This participant saw Pilate as someone who could not fire a person, as someone who was brushing the issue under the carpet. This participant argued that Pilate's job was to solve the problem, not to throw it back to the crowd.

Another member saw Pilate in quite a different light, in a much more cynical light. For this participant Pilate was a well-seasoned politician, who was weighing up a tricky situation. Pilate had recognised that he had two rival crowds on his hands, and he was calmly calculating that this man's life was expendable to protect his own job and career.

At this point another member of the group wanted to find a basis for solving the dispute about Pilate's character and motivation. He returned to the theological plot underpinning John's Gospel. This narrative is about the meeting of the two very different opposing powers. It is about two parallel universes colliding. We have misunderstanding as the two worlds collide. He summarised his thesis with succinct and effective expression: 'Here is the true king with self-appointed weakness against a pseudo-king with self-appointed power'.

This forceful theological analysis still failed to convince the first participant who had spoken. He returned to his thesis that Pilate was a just man, acting fairly: 'I got the impression that Pilate wanted to release Jesus and expected the people to agree to that'. Others of the group tried to dissuade the colleague of his generous views. They argued that Jesus would have crossed Pilate's radar many times before. Pilate's political advisers would have warned him about the dangers of a wandering Messiah coming into Jerusalem at Passover time, when the city was overcrowded and when the political fervour of the Jewish people was stirred up by that Passover festival. Pilate does the right thing for himself and for the Roman Empire by fending off a potential uprising.

At this point another member of the group wanted to move the conversation on beyond the growing impasse. We have said enough about Pilate. How about thinking about Jesus' role instead? Shall we think about Jesus, given that we have to preach on Jesus, not on Pilate? The first response to this change of direction reflected on how Jesus may be seen to be emptying himself of power before Pilate. The second response, however, reflected on how Jesus in fact held the upper hand in the powerful way in which he responded to Pilate's questioning. Here Jesus was taking Pilate along a path that led to the discovery of the real truth. Pilate's response is to deflect Jesus' direction of questioning and to refuse to be drawn in. The third response reflected on how kingship had been handled earlier in John's Gospel when, after the Johannine account of the Feeding of the 5000, Jesus evaded the crowd because they wanted to proclaim him as king.

As time was running out, one member of the group tried to sum up the experience of participating in the group. 'As a thinking type', he said, 'I enjoy a passage like this. It really stretches my mind'. The group reflected that they had largely engaged in a theoretical analysis of how the passage fits into the wider narrative of John's Gospel. When preaching on the passage they would largely take the same approach. For them the Feast of Christ the King was the ideal occasion on which to explore the Johannine treatise on the collision of kingly powers.

Feeling

The group of five high-scoring feeling types (33, 27, 25, 23 and 21) immediately acknowledged their discomfort with the Johannine passage. They recognised that this was accessing their feeling function first, but could not resist expressing their dislike of the way St John talks about the Jews. The second comment identified how Pilate asked many questions which Jesus did not answer. There was a limited attempt to explore what lay behind Pilate's approach: were these questions being asked aggressively? Was he confused? A sympathetic view might see this as Pilate granting Jesus the opportunity to tell his version of the story. In return, Jesus appears to invite Pilate to own his own thoughts and feelings about what he has been told by the Jewish leaders.

Next, the group noticed that the passage stopped before verse 38 and thus before Pilate's climactic questions: what is truth? Somewhat dismayed by this, they resolved that they would preach on this verse anyway. Having asserted this, the group lapsed into awkward silence. This silence occurred quite early on in the group's time together.

When the silence was broken it was in order to explore how talking about the relationship between Pilate and Jesus might facilitate the preacher to talk about *our* relationship with Jesus. One participant suggested that the preacher might invite members of the congregation to identify what questions they might ask Jesus. Another participant expressed concern that this might make some people feel uncomfortable: how would they feel about having to answer a question like that? The group subsequently began to explore whether their congregations had a majority of thinking types or feeling types.

Having done this, this group of high-scoring feeling types was ready to return to the passage, if only to criticise how abstract they felt it to be. Behind the Johannine text, they seemed unable to discern real people having a real conversation; they were unable to access empathy for what might be below the surface or between the lines of this interaction. One participant admitted to being cross that Jesus was not more straightforward.

There was a brief attempt to develop the discussion more thematically, recognising how the word 'Kingdom' had a wide semantic field. The group referenced a Muslim recently preaching in a Cathedral and the associated controversy,

although they were unable to recall where this happened. This reference exhausted their thinking along these lines, so they embarked on a discussion concerning which hymns they would choose to illuminate the theme, including *Servant King; Rejoice the Lord is King; and The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy*.

Some feeling-type talk followed as the group began to explore the implications of their workshop for preaching. First, there was a recognition that the story they were exploring would end in crucifixion and that this is always a painful subject. This realisation led to an exploration of the dilemma of whether to preach to their congregations in a way that would suit them (affirm them) or in a way that would challenge them (unsettle them). Finally, they began to reflect on how those hearing this story for the first time would feel about Jesus: would they not be cross that Jesus does not do more to save himself? One participant summarised the group's difficulty with the passage in asserting that it was not a passage that engendered feelings. Another voice offered a title for the sermon: 'How does Jesus being King impact on your life?' This thought was developed by the comment that 'impacting on your life' was a favoured approach to preaching.

Towards the end of the time, the group, which had more than once lapsed into confused silence, found itself reflecting on the rather abstract concept of truth. They wondered whether it was a word that carried the same weight it once did? If they were going to have to engage with John's Gospel, they would prefer John 11, which records that 'Jesus wept', which one member identified play to his strengths. They concluded this was not a 'touchy/feely passage', but a word-based passage rather than a feeling-based passage.

Overall, the clear impression given by this group of high-scoring feeling types was that they did not like this passage, and that they would find it difficult to be energised to preach on it. It had failed to resource their proclamation for the Feast of Christ the King.

Feeling and thinking

The third group comprised six lower-scoring feeling types and one lower-scoring thinking type participants, allowing both preferences to work together. These participants began by scanning the worksheet that they had been given and reading the specific tasks. One member of the group got a little bit stuck on what was meant by the instruction to 'evaluate' the passage. The remainder of the group understood that and thought that the focus of the first question was on the word 'how' – asking about the process by which we engaged with the substance of the passage. Then the group quickly identified some central themes or ideas at a fairly abstract level: power and control, paradox, irony.

The group also approached the passage with a keen awareness of its textual context as part of the trial scenes within the Johannine Passion account, and they were struck

by the fact that the passage ends before the well-known key question from Pilate, when Pilate asks Jesus, 'What is truth?'. They also noted that this scene, although forming part of a formal, administrative act which is in that sense public, has the feel of a private, almost intimate, conversation between the two protagonists. Linked to this, the passage appears as a snapshot of a broader narrative – there is much that comes before and after this passage. One member of the group made the point that his knowledge of Bach's St John Passion is so deep and strong that he finds it impossible to read this passage without hearing that music and without the music affecting his reading of the text – a musical hermeneutic.

This group planned its feedback for the plenary session in a well-organised manner, distinguishing amongst the aspects of the conversation that reflected a feeling preference, the aspects of the conversation that reflected a thinking preference, and the ways in which the passage would resource preaching on the Feast of Christ the King. The following aspects of the discussion were identified as reflecting a feeling-type engagement with the passage:

- A sensitivity and attention to the tone of voice in which the passage is read or heard – the power dynamic between Pilate and Jesus is complex and paradoxical and is heavily dependent on the tone of voice (aggression or assertiveness vs. questioning or gentle) in which the dialogue is conducted.
- Questioning who the underdog is – this was again a point about the power dynamic, but was focussed not on the analytical observation about paradox, but on the emotional or empathetic approach to the passage and on who attracts our sympathy.
- The strong visual imagery underpinning the scene: is Pilate raised on a judgement seat or dais, with Christ bound, perhaps kneeling, at his feet; or are they speaking on a more equal footing, face to face?

The following aspects of the discussion were identified as reflecting a thinking-type engagement with the passage:

- Discussion about the idea of kingship and specifically the probing about the nature of Christ's kingship.
- The dialogue seen as akin to a fencing contest, containing pointed questions and responses, but with the oddity that the responses do not parry the thrust – Jesus responds to a question not with an answer, but with a differently focussed question, or with a statement that again does not seek to meet the question that Pilate has asked. This is more like shadow fencing, engaging not with the actual opponent, but with a different one that is not seen.
- Noting, perhaps to varying degrees within the group, the predisposition to anticipate that the exchange would be logically coherent, with answers responding to questions, such that the mismatch between question and answer appeared striking.
- Asking questions about Pilate's objectives in his questioning of Jesus: was he trying to find the basis for a guilty verdict, or to exculpate or exonerate him; did he want to crucify him in order to please the religious leadership, or precisely the reverse?

The following topics were identified for resourcing preaching, with an eye on the occasion of the Feast of Christ the King:

- Illustrating and describing the radically different sort of Kingship of Christ.
- The relationship between political power and truth.
- The way in which people sometimes engage in proxy battles, where the truth resides in the subtext, not the surface level dispute.
- The possibilities of a dramatic rendering of the passage, bringing out the paradox or ambiguity of the power dynamic by having contrasting presentations (Pilate as domineering or inquiring; Christ as subjugated or confidently assertive).
- The possibility of an Ignatian-style 'inhabiting the text' approach, entering the story and imagining the paradox and irony from the inside.
- The weight carried by language in this passage and how careful we must be with our choice of words and the meaning we attach to the words of others – this focussed on the Evangelist's use of the term Jew/Jews, as well as the central idea of kingship and kingdom – in both cases, there is a need to remain open-minded about the possibility that these terms have a more complex and less obvious meaning than that which perhaps first occurs to us.

The experience of this group that brought together four feeling types and one thinking type illustrated how collaboration between two type preferences could both generate stimulating insights from biblical interpretation and good foundations for liturgical preaching.

Conclusion

Lectionary readings for the long-established Feasts of the Church tend to be rich in materials to resource the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) and the two judging functions (thinking and feeling). For example, Christmas is richly resourced by the birth narratives (see Francis & Smith 2013) whilst Easter is richly resourced by the resurrection narratives (see Francis & Jones 2011). As a much more recent Feast welcomed into the lectionary calendar, readings for the Feast of Christ the King may be somewhat less obvious. Employing the theory underpinning the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, the present study has focussed on two of the readings appointed by the 3 year lectionary cycle for the Feast of Christ the King during Year B: Psalm 93 and John 18:33–37. The experimental method identified Psalm 93 as rich in material to engage the perceiving process and divided participants into three groups: those who expressed a clear preference for intuition, those who expressed a clear preference for sensing and those who positioned themselves in the middle territory. The experimental method also identified John 18:33–37 as rich in material to engage the judging process and divided the participants into three groups: those who expressed a preference for thinking, those who expressed a strong preference for feeling and those who expressed a less strong preference for feeling and one low-scoring thinking

type. The findings from this experimental method lead to the conclusion that, whilst this choice of lectionary readings may be a joy for intuitive types and for thinking types, it may prove to be a nightmare for sensing types and for feeling types. This conclusion is based on the following observations.

Firstly, the group of high-scoring intuitive types concluded their workshops going away feeling energised by their imaginative creativity and feeling better equipped to preach on Psalm 93. They had discovered that this Psalm was rich in images that would resource their preaching on the last Sunday of the lectionary year and they felt motivated to preach on the theme of Christ the King. By way of contrast, the group of high-scoring sensing types had really failed to enjoy the workshop. They had found the invitation to draw on the imagery of Psalm 93 to resource a sermon on Christ the King frustrating and unfruitful. Somehow this Psalm did not resource the practical application of the Christian faith sought for by the group of sensing types.

Secondly, the group of thinking types concluded their workshop going away with a sense of enjoyment. 'As a thinking type', a member of the group said, 'I enjoy a passage like this. It really stretches my mind'. The group reflected that they had largely engaged in a theoretical analysis of how the passage fits into the wider narrative of John's Gospel. When preaching on the passage they would largely take the same approach. For this group the Feast of Christ the King was an ideal occasion to explore the Johannine treatise on the collision of kingly powers. By way of contrast, the group of more high-scoring feeling types concluded that they really did not like this passage, and that they would find it difficult to be energised to preach on it. It had failed to resource their proclamation for the Feast of Christ the King.

The clear contrasts between the responses of the group of sensing types and the responses of the groups of intuitive types, and the clear contrast between the responses of the group of thinking types and the responses of the group of feeling types lead to three practical insights, one concerning the design of lectionaries, one concerning preachers and one concerning church congregations. In terms of the design of lectionaries, it may be helpful to include voices from those concerned with homiletics and hermeneutics, alongside voices from liturgist and biblical scholars. All three disciplines may have constructive insights to offer.

In terms of preachers, the evidence suggests that when preachers work in type-alike groups, the experience reinforces and accentuates their distinctive type preference. When a group of intuitive types work together, untrammelled by sensing types, the intuitive function flourishes. When a group of sensing types work together, untrammelled by intuitive types, the sensing function flourishes. When a group of thinking types work together, untrammelled by feeling types, the thinking function flourishes. When a group of feeling types work together, untrammelled by thinking types, the feeling function flourishes. The experience of working in type-alike groups is a constructive way through

which preachers may become more aware of their own preferred approach to preaching, and more conscious both of the strength and the limitations of their preferred approach.

In terms of church congregations, it may be helpful to reflect on the wisdom of selecting lectionary readings that are a joy for intuitive types and for thinking types, but a nightmare for sensing types and for feeling types. Another strand of research that has explored the psychological type profile of church congregations has documented the uneven distribution of sensing types and intuitive types, and the uneven distribution of feeling types and thinking types within church congregations. For example, in an initial study amongst 185 rural Anglican churchgoers in Wales, Francis et al. (2007) reported a strong weighting towards sensing types and feeling types. In a more substantial study amongst 2135 female and 1169 male Anglican churchgoers in England, Francis, Robbins and Craig (2011) reported that 81% of the women and 78% of the men preferred sensing; and that 70% of the women and 42% of the men preferred feeling. Given the predominance of women in the Anglican churches, these data means that 60% of the overall congregation prefer feeling. In a similar study conducted in Australia amongst 936 female and 591 male churchgoers from a range of different Christian denominations, Robbins and Francis (2011) reported that 81% of the women and 78% of the men preferred sensing; and that 62% of the women and 40% of the men preferred feeling. Again, given the predominance of women in the Australian churches, these data mean that 53% of the overall congregation prefer feeling.

A strength of the present study is that it included not only groups composed of the same psychological type, but also two mixed groups: one group of low-scoring intuitive types together with lower scoring sensing types, and one group of low-scoring feeling types together with one low-scoring thinking type. It is these two mixed groups that illustrate the value of sensing types and intuitive types working together and the value of feeling types and thinking types working together. A practical insight also emerges from this observation. When preachers are faced with challenging lections, might there not be advantages in groups of preachers meeting together to reflect on scripture together. More pertinently, when the Church recognises that it is faced with a major Feast for which the appointed lections may be a joy for some types but a nightmare for other types, might there not be advantages in facilitating workshops intentionally designed both to foster creativity through type-alike groups and to cross-fertilise creativity by conversation amongst such groups. The Feast of Christ the King may provide an excellent occasion for such an initiative, carrying benefits both for preachers and for members of church congregations.

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Authors' contributions

L.J.F. took responsibility for overall conceptualisation of the paper. All three authors served as observers in the groups, analysed the data and shaped the paper.

Ethical considerations

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