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Jones, S.H. and Francis, L.J. (2024) Jesus Calling the First Disciples: Reading Luke's Account Through the Lenses of Sensing and Intuition. *Rural Theology*, 22 (1). pp. 44-51. ISSN 1470-4994

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**Jesus Calling the First Disciples: Reading Luke's Account Through
the Lenses of Sensing and Intuition**

Accepted 25.3.2024: *Rural Theology*

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ABSTRACT

The Lucan account of Jesus' calling of the first disciples differs from the dominant and better known Marcan narrative in a number of ways. The Lucan account has been prefaced by an introduction to the person and actions of Jesus and specifically triggered by the miraculous catch of fish that Luke shares with John 21. Drawing on psychological type theory and the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, this study tests the hypothesis that sensing types and intuitive types will see different things in this passage. The theory was tested by inviting a group of 19 clergy and lay members of ministry teams to work in type-alike groups. The data are consistent with the theory.

Keywords: psychological type; biblical hermeneutics; reader perspective; empirical theology

Introduction

The reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics takes seriously the context and situation of the reader. Initially the reader perspective approach was influenced by sociological theories and sociological categories, drawing attention to the distinctive voices of the oppressed in liberation readings of scripture (Botta & Andiñach, 2009), to the

distinctive voices of women in feminist readings of scripture (see Schottroff & Wacker, 2012), or to the distinctive voices of ethnic groups, say in the Black readings of scripture (see Brown, 2004). More recently the reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics has also been influenced by psychological theories and psychological categories. Grounded in Jungian psychological type theory (Jung, 1971), the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching, as set out by Francis and Village (2008), draws attention to the distinctive voices of the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) and of the two judging functions (thinking and feeling). The present study focuses on the perceiving functions.

The perceiving functions are concerned with the way in which people receive and process information; this can be done through use of sensing or through use of intuition. Sensing types (S) tend to focus on specific details, rather than the overall picture. They are concerned with the actual, the real, and the practical and tend to be down-to-earth and matter-of-fact. They may feel that particular details are more significant than general patterns. They are frequently fond of the traditional and conventional. They may be conservative and tend to prefer what is known and well-established. In contrast, intuitive types (N) focus on the possibilities of a situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. They may feel that perception by the senses is not as valuable as information gained from the unconscious mind; indirect associations and concepts impact their perceptions. They focus on the overall picture, rather than specific facts and data. They follow their inspirations enthusiastically, but not always realistically. They can appear to be up in the air and may be seen as idealistic dreamers. They often aspire to bring innovative change to established conventions.

Initially the SIFT approach was developed on the basis of theoretical extrapolation from psychological type theory and tested by a rigorous application of that theory to the principal Gospel readings proposed by the Revised Common Lectionary by Francis and

Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002). More recently the SIFT approach has been tested by a series of 30 empirical studies. Each study in the series has selected a passage of scripture and invited participants to explore and to respond to that passage of scripture working in groups that have drawn together individuals of similar psychological type preferences. Recent examples of these studies include the cleansing of the temple in Mark 11: 11-21 (Francis & ap Siôn, 2016), the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24: 13-35 (Francis & Smith, 2017), the call of the first disciples in Luke 5: 1-17 (Francis & ap Siôn, 2017), the missionary journey of the disciples in Mark 6: 6b-17 (Francis, Smith, & Francis-Dehqani, 2017), the pericopes on Pilate and Judas in Matthew 27: 3-10, 19-25 (Francis & Ross, 2018), the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1: 4-9 (Francis, Jones, & Martinson, 2019), the search for the lost sheep in Matthew 18: 10-14 (Jones & Francis, 2019), Jesus' dialogue with Pilate in John 18: 33-37 (Francis, Smith, & Evans, 2021), Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 9: 26-40 (Francis & Jones, 2022), and the resurrection appearance at the lakeside in John 21: 1-12a (Francis & Stevenson, under review).

Working within the tradition established by these empirical studies, the intention of the present study was to explore the reading of the Lucan narrative of Jesus' calling of the disciples (set out in Luke 5: 1-7) through the lenses of sensing and intuition. The Lucan account is particularly interesting because the dominant narrative shaping the call to discipleship is generally supplied by the Marcan tradition. In Mark the call to discipleship is placed at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. In Luke the call is placed somewhat later, after Jesus' identity and power has been well established. In Mark, no great deed of power is connected with the two separate calls issued to Peter and Andrew (who are casting nets) and issued to John and James (who are mending nets). In Luke, the miraculous catch of fish (also related in John 21) precedes a single call.

The concentration on the perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) is particularly relevant to this passage given the richness of the passage both in terms of detail and in terms of potential for stimulating connections with big ideas.

Method

Procedure

In the context of a two-day programme concerned with developing effective ministry teams, type-aware clergy and lay ministry team participants (N = 19) were invited to work in four groups organised according to their preferences on the perceiving process: two groups of sensing type participants and two groups of intuitive type participants. Participants were given a printed copy of Luke 5: 1-7. In the groups they were asked to address the following activity: What do you see in this passage and what sparks your imagination?

Analysis

One member of each group was asked to note the discussion, report back to the plenary session, and give the notes to the authors of this paper. The authors also documented the feedback to the plenary session. The following analysis draws on both sources of data.

Results

Intuitive group one

Intuitive group one had drawn together participants who had a strong preference for intuition. The group took very little time to study the details of the Lucan narrative but began to identify immediately major themes raised by the passage. The person feeding back recognised that the group was more interested in generating multiple ideas than in developing those ideas. The process, however, generated energy and enthusiasm. In overview, eight themes had emerged.

The first theme concerned Jesus' authority. This was demonstrated by the way in which Jesus got into Simon's boat and requisitioned it. It was demonstrated by the way in

which Jesus told Simon to put out into the deep water and to let down the nets. What Jesus wanted, others delivered.

The second theme concerned speculating about the disciples' feelings, being told how to fish by someone they knew as the carpenter. Here is a humorous narrative about the incongruity of Jesus' interventions.

The third theme concerned reflection on the transforming power of Jesus' presence. This was demonstrated by Jesus' ability to turn a disaster (a fruitless night's labour) into a resounding success (their nets were beginning to break).

The fourth theme concerned reflecting on Simon's tone of voice when he said, 'If you say so, I will let down the nets'. There is more than one attitude with which we can respond to Jesus' invitation to collaborate with his call: slow resignation or enthusiastic collaboration.

The fifth theme concerned speculating about the wisdom of calling Simon in the first place. He is the one who both recognises Jesus as the Christ and to whom Jesus says, 'Get behind me Satan'. He is the one who chooses to accompany Jesus to Gethsemane and who denies him three times before daybreak.

The sixth theme explored the implications of putting out into the deep water, setting out into the unknown, taking risks and going ahead in faith. Deep water not only promises rich rewards, but also threatens danger.

The seventh theme focused on the idea of speaking to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. This prompted discussion about local collaboration across the deanery and with ecumenical partners.

The final theme celebrated the abundance that emerged from the sea when Jesus showed up. Our expectations should not be low. When Jesus invites us to cast our nets, the rewards can be immense.

Intuitive group two

Intuitive group two had drawn together participants who felt that their preference for intuition was less strong. The experience of this group was not dissimilar from that of intuitive group one. The person feeding back began by saying that the group found this to be a rich passage and an enriching experience. Within the first couple of minutes the group had generated enough ideas for ten sermons. Trying to organise the richness and diversity of the discussion, the person feeding back identified three groups of ideas: metaphors, questions, and weight given to specific words.

The group became energised by exploring the variety of rich metaphors in the Lucan passage. The metaphor of *testing* links with the Church's call to mission and to growth. The metaphor of *deep water* links with the challenges we face to go out into uncharted territories, and to take risks for God. The metaphor of *breaking nets* links with the challenges we face to prepare for the growth that God may give to us in our ministry.

The whole tone of the passage raises many unanswered and unanswerable questions. We want to ask about how much the crowd had had experience of Jesus' teaching before what took place in the narrative. We want to ask whether the crowd, Simon, James and John had had previous experience of Jesus' miraculous powers before the great catch of fish. We want to ask why Simon seemed to be willing to let Jesus take over his boat and show him how to fish.

The word that really energised the group concerned the way in which the disciples addressed Jesus as 'Master'. 'Master', they said, 'we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets'. The context implied respect for someone in authority. At this point curiosity stimulated an internet search for the underlying Greek word, where the suggestion was found that the word could be rendered as 'Chief' or 'Commander'.

Intrigued by the experience of working in a type-alike group, intuitive group two then left the task that had been set to one side and engaged in a broader discussion of the hermeneutical approach, assessing the relative weight of psychological type and of acquired skills in biblical interpretation.

Sensing group one

Sensing group one had drawn together participants who had a strong preference for sensing. This group sat for a while in silence pondering on the text before anyone spoke. Then the approach was to work systematically through the passage drawing attention to the points being made by the narrative. The effect was that of generating a set of discrete bullet points, itemising details from the passage:

- the crowd was pressing on Jesus;
- Jesus needed to find a spot from which to address the crowd;
- Jesus chose Simon's boat and Simon took the boat away from the shore;
- Having been chosen in this way Simon becomes the spokesperson for the group;
- Jesus told Simon to put out into deep water and let down his nets;
- Simon was reluctant to do this, having worked all night to no good effect;
- In spite of his reluctance Simon obeys;
- There is an interesting move from singular to plural in which Simon says, *We* have worked all night, yet *I* will let down the nets;
- Simon's obedience resulted in a remarkably rich catch.

Having worked systematically through the passage, sensing group one then began to reflect on the practical application of the passage, itemising specific applications:

- Jesus asks us to use the skills that we have got;
- We may be equipped to use those skills in ways that we do not fully realise;
- Jesus calls us with our own skills and we may not know why;

- We need to trust what Jesus asks us to do and go ahead to do it;
- Simon learnt so much from obedience and from practical actions;
- Simon learnt to trust Jesus' word, to be expectant and to be obedient;
- Practically Jesus uses what we have;
- The story shows both Simon's individual initiative and the group working together as a team;
- We learn when we act on God's calling.

Sensing group two

Sensing group two had drawn together participants who felt that their preference for sensing was less strong. This group also gave close attention to the detail of the passage, but also began to group their observations under broader themes.

There is some really rich detail in the passage. You can feel the crowd pressing in. You can see the boats begin to search. You can smell the great catch of fish. You can really engage with the people in the narrative. Jesus is busy and active, doing this and doing that.

Then the focus shifts to Simon. Simon is key in giving over his boat to Jesus, in letting down the net, in organising the great catch of fish. But their partners in the other boats are key too when they come to help them. Here is a kind of enacted parable, where Jesus starts things going, where Simon gets involved, and where the other disciples have a part to play.

Here is a narrative rich with movement and with change. See Jesus get into the boat and move out to sea. See Jesus pressed hard by the people on the coast, and then see Jesus as the focus of their attention as he sat in the boat teaching. See the nets there on the shore, empty after a fruitless night's work, and then see the nets so full they are ready to break.

Then like sensing group one, sensing group two began to reflect on the practical implications of the passage. Here is a kind of enacted parable from which we can learn. Jesus

uses what is there. Jesus discerns the situation. Jesus knows the potential. The crowd was pressing on Jesus to hear the Word of God. Jesus did more than preach to the crowd, he displayed the power of God. He took over the boat and turned it into a pulpit. He changed Simon from seeing only empty nets to being in charge of full nets. He found the fishermen empty handed and empty hearted and he galvanised them into working as dynamic partners. It is as if Jesus said to them, 'You have given me the boat; now I am giving you an abundance of fish'.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching by inviting 19 type-aware clergy and lay ministry team participants to work in four groups organised according to their preferences on the perceiving process: two groups of sensing type participants and two groups of intuitive type participants. The documented processes and outcomes of the four groups lead to the following three main conclusions.

The first conclusion focuses on the process itself. It is an unusual experience for hermeneutical communities to be formed in which intuitive types and sensing types are not both involved and interacting with each other. A hermeneutical community comprised entirely of intuitive types accentuates the recognised characteristics of intuition. The tendency for intuitive types to generate multiple ideas is not held in check by sensing types. Intuition runs wild. Intuitive types are energised by this freedom and display their natural strengths. At the same time, a hermeneutical community comprised entirely of sensing types accentuates the recognised characteristics of sensing. The tendency for sensing types to focus on the details is not held in check by intuitive types. Sensing runs wild. Sensing types are energised by this freedom and display their natural strengths. While both sensing types and intuitive types had been asked to address the same two-fold task (What do you see in this passage and what sparks your imagination?), it is evident that neither perspective identified that two

different components were involved. The two sensing groups concentrated on the detail that they saw in the passage, while the two intuitive groups allowed the passage to spark their imagination.

The second conclusion focuses on the experience of the participants when the four groups brought the outcomes of their work to the plenary session and when these outcomes were shared. Sensing types found themselves enriched by listening to how the intuitive types had allowed the passage to spark their imagination. Sensing types wished that they had seen the passage in that light too. Intuitive types found themselves enriched by listening to how the sensing types had drawn out the detail in the passage. Intuitive types wished that they had noticed many of these details too. By bringing the two hermeneutical communities together (sensing types and intuitive types) both are enriched. The conversation between the People of God and the Word of God is enriched.

The third conclusion focuses on the contrasting content generated by sensing types and by intuitive types. Two main features characterised the sensing approach to the short passage from Luke's Gospel. The sensing types really wanted to savour the details evident within the passage, and they wanted to discern the practical application that emerges from these details. When sensing types are in the pulpit, they may tend to stick to the text in front of them, to speak about the details of the passage, and to shape a message of practical application. Two main features also characterised the intuitive approach to the short passage from Luke's Gospel. The intuitive types really wanted to savour the big ideas and large themes that were sparked in their minds by the passage, and they wanted to see how these big ideas and large themes related to their experience of God in the world today. When intuitive types are in the pulpit, they may tend to want to draw their listeners into the same big ideas and large themes, and to lead their listeners into seeing the same connections within their experience of God in the world today.

What the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching does is to encourage preachers in a disciplined way to draw on both sensing and intuition in order to achieve a richer and more rounded interpretation of scripture, and also to engage more effectively both the intuition types and the sensing types listening within the congregation.

The present study has been part of a developing programme of research exploring how aspects of psychological type shape reader responses to specific passages of scripture. Further studies are needed to expand the repertoire of evidence on this theme.

Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval from the School of Humanities, York St John University (Ethical approval code: HUM-RS-AV-08-21-01).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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