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Preparing for Disability Awareness Sunday: An educational exercise drawing on  
psychological perspectives for biblical hermeneutics

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### **Abstract**

Some of the Gospel passages proposed for Disability Awareness Sunday raise challenges as well as opportunities for preachers. This paper reports findings from an educational exercise, drawing on insights from the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, in which 23 Anglican clergy studied Mark 2: 1-12 and Mark 10: 46-52 in groups structured according to their psychological type preferences: sensing or intuition, thinking or feeling. The data demonstrate how a richer interpretation of the passages emerges when the groups share their distinctive perspectives. Recommendations are offered for developing preaching workshops on this theme.

*Keywords:* biblical hermeneutics, psychological type, disability, Christian education

### Introduction

Disability Awareness Sunday in the USA and Disability Sunday in the UK has caught the attention of a number of Christian denominations and stimulated the emergence of para-church organisations dedicated to this specific theme. For example in the UK, Churches for All, the para-church partnership of Christian disability organisations, provided web-based guidance for Disability Sunday, 5 July 2015. The Christian charity Through the Roof took the lead in preparing the *Disability Sunday Research Pack 2015* (see [churchesforall.org.uk](http://churchesforall.org.uk)). 'In the USA, the Reformed Churches in America provided web-based resources for Disability Sunday (see [rca.org](http://rca.org)).

Among the resources offered to support churches for providing appropriate services on Disability Awareness Sunday or Disability Sunday are recommended passages from scripture. Inevitably the Gospel passages recommended raise fundamental questions about the acceptability and persistence of disability within the Christian community and about the expectations raised for healing.

Such fundamental questions offer both opportunities and challenges for preachers (see Black, 1996). The Churches for All website (accessed February 2015) included recommendations for the following Gospel passages that include references to healing: Luke 4: 18-19; Luke 4: 17-26; Mark 2: 1-12; Mark 10: 46-52; and John 9: 1-41. Luke 4 :18-19 places Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth where he turns to the prophet Isaiah and proclaims that the prophecy is fulfilled in him. Here Jesus has been anointed not only to proclaim the release of captives and the year of the Lord's favour, but to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind. In Luke 5: 17-26 the paralysed man is let down through the roof, and the narrative links healing of the paralysis with forgiveness of sins. In Mark 10: 46-52 the blind man Bartimaeus interrupts Jesus' way through Jericho, and the narrative links healing with faith. In John 9: 1-41 Jesus gives sight to the man born blind, and the narrative gives voice to Jesus

saying, 'I have come into this world to give sight to the sightless and to make blind those who see.'

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to explore, from an empirical perspective, how trained and practising preachers within the Anglican tradition in England (Church of England) may be inclined to use some of these recommended Gospel resources for their preaching on Disability Awareness Sunday (specifically the accounts of healing offered in Mark 2: 1-12 and Mark 10: 46-52). This aim is given structure and focus by locating the study within two current ongoing strands of research pioneered by a research group working across three universities in the UK: Warwick (led by Leslie J Francis in the psychology of religion), York St John (led by Andrew Village in empirical theology), and Glyndŵr (led by Tania ap Siôn in pastoral sciences). One of these strands is grounded in hermeneutical theory and the other in the science of biblical hermeneutics and preaching.

### **Hermeneutical theory**

Hermeneutical theory has been significantly influenced over the past three decades by the reader perspective approach. The reader perspective approach recognises that the dialogue between the text and the reader is shaped not only by the characteristics of the text but also by the characteristics of the reader. The early and influential contributions to the reader perspective approach within biblical hermeneutics were shaped by sociological insights into factors like sex, power and ethnicity, giving rise to the systematic interrogation of the voices of women, of the oppressed, and of ethnic groups, in the identification of feminist readings, liberation readings, and black readings of scripture. Social location became a key concept in hermeneutical theory (see Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, 1995b).

The reader perspective approach has also been influenced by psychological theory. In an early, but neglected, paper, Stiefel (1992) suggested that psychological type theory, as originally proposed by Jung (1971) and developed by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

(Myers & McCaulley, 1985), may influence not only the ways in which preachers prepare and present their sermons, but also the ways in which they read and interpret the scriptures on which they preach. In its developed form psychological type theory distinguishes between two orientations (introversion and extraversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling) and two attitudes toward the outer world (judging and perceiving). Most scientific theories of personality, like the Three Major Dimensions proposed by Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) and the Big Five Factors proposed by Costa and McCrae (1985), suggest that individual differences are best characterised as located on a continuum, for example introversion moving through ambiversion to extraversion. Psychological type theory, however, suggests that individual differences are best characterised as comprising discrete categories and types, for example introversion *or* extraversion.

The heart of psychological type theory is concerned with the two core processes of gathering information and evaluating information. The perceiving process is the irrational process concerned with the ways in which information is gathered; the perceiving process makes no judgement about that data. The evaluating or judging process is the rational process concerned with the ways in which information is evaluated. According to the theory, the perceiving process is expressed through two different approaches: the sensing function (S) concerned with ‘the detail’ and the intuitive function (N) concerned with ‘the big picture’. The evaluating or judging process is also expressed through two different approaches: the feeling function (F) concerned with ‘subjective values’ and the thinking function (T) concerned with ‘objective logic’. According to the theory most individuals have access to all four functions, but naturally prefer one perceiving function over the other (sensing or intuition) and naturally prefer one evaluating or judging function over the other (thinking or feeling).

According to the theory, the two orientations are concerned with the source of personal energy and how and where it is focused. Extraverts are oriented toward the outer world. They are energised by events and people around them; they enjoy communicating and thrive in a stimulating and exciting environment. Introverts are energised by their inner ideas and concepts and they enjoy solitude, silence, and contemplation. According to the theory, the two attitudes toward the outer world are concerned with which of the sets of functions (judging or perceiving) is preferred in dealing with the outer world. Judging types employ thinking or feeling in the outer world. They seek to order, rationalise and structure their outer world. Perceiving types employ sensing or intuition in the outer world. They have a flexible, spontaneous, open-ended approach to their outer world.

Stiefel (1992) suggested that the two orientations (introversion and extraversion) and the two attitudes (judging and perceiving) may be core to ways in which preachers prepare and present their sermons. However, it is the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) and the two judging functions (feeling and thinking) that may be core to shaping how preachers read and interpret the scriptures from which they preach. Preachers who prefer sensing may concentrate on the details of the scripture passage and 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 and 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.

Unaware of Stiefel's earlier writing, first Francis (2003) and then Francis and Village (2008) in their book *Preaching with all our souls* advanced a fuller integration between

hermeneutical theory and psychological type theory in the development of the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching. In this approach they draw out more fully the implications of the four psychological functions of sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking.

### **Science of biblical hermeneutics**

The developing science of biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching has drawn on a series of recent coordinated empirical studies, employing qualitative research techniques, that has set out to test the theory underpinning the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching by observing the connection between psychological type preferences and the ways in which clergy and lay people interpret and proclaim scripture (Francis, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Francis & Jones, 2011, 2014, 2015; Francis & Smith, 2012, 2013, 2014). Each of these studies has focused on specific passages of scripture and invited participants to work together in groups that have drawn together individuals of similar psychological type preferences. On some occasions, the participants have been invited to work in four parallel groups according to dominant psychological type preferences. On some occasions the participants have first been invited to share in groups established by the perceiving process (distinguishing between sensing and intuition) and then in groups established by the judging process (distinguishing between thinking and feeling). In the latter case the tasks have been differentiated so that the groups based on sensing and intuition have been invited to work on an issue drawing on the perceiving functions and so that the groups based on thinking and feeling have been invited to work on an issue drawing on the judging functions.

For example, in the first of these studies to be published, Francis (2010) invited two different groups of Anglican preachers, licensed readers in England (N = 24) and licensed clergy in Northern Ireland (N = 22) to work in groups defined by their dominant



psychological type preferences (dominant sensing types, dominant intuitive types, dominant thinking types, and dominant feeling types). Within these dominant type groups they were asked to prepare a presentation on Mark 6: 34-44 (the feeding of the five thousand). In the most recent of these studies, Francis and Jones (2015) focused on Mark 6: 7-14 and Mark 6: 33-41 (two passages reflecting different aspects of discipleship), working with a group of ordained and lay Anglican ministers (N = 73). One of the passages was discussed in groups shaped by preferences for sensing and intuition, and the other in groups shaped by preferences for thinking and feeling.

A clear consensus has begun to emerge from the cumulative evidence generated by these ten studies, supporting the view that psychological type preferences are linked with distinctive approaches to reading and to proclaiming scripture. In accordance with the theory sensing types tend to focus on details in the passage, but find it hard to reach consensus on the larger picture. Intuitive types tend to be quick to identify imaginative themes, but show little interest in the details. Feeling types tend to place much more emphasis on the matters of the human heart illustrated by the passage. Thinking types tend to focus on and to analyse the big theological issues raised by the passage. As this body of research begins to develop and to grow so it has been possible to test the theory over a wider range of material, but as yet the empirical bases for the theory remain relatively slim. Further studies in this tradition are needed. The present paper has been designed to do that, in relation to Disability Awareness Sunday.

### **Research question**

Against this background, the aim of the present empirical study was to draw on the hermeneutical theory proposed by Francis and Village (2008) and to build on (and thus extend) the recent qualitative research tradition established by Francis (2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013), Francis and Jones (2011, 2014, 2015), and Francis and Smith (2012, 2013, 2014) in

order to explore how psychological type preferences are reflected in reading and interpreting two passages from Mark's Gospel that have been identified as appropriate passages for Disability Awareness Sunday, namely Mark 2: 1-12 and Mark 10: 46-52.

### **Method**

#### **Procedure**

The research took place in the context of a residential training programme for clergy (during January 2015) where reading, reflecting on and proclaiming scripture were integral parts of the programme. Participants were invited to explore their psychological type profile and then to experience working in groups structured on the basis of psychological type theory. First, groups were organised according to preferences on the perceiving process, distinguishing between sensing and intuition. Second, groups were organised according to preferences on the judging process, distinguishing between thinking and feeling. They were assigned tasks appropriate to the two processes.

#### **Measure**

Psychological type was assessed by Form G (Anglicised) of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). This 126-item instrument uses a forced-choice format to indicate preferences for introversion and extraversion (the two orientations), between sensing and intuition (the two perceiving functions), between thinking and feeling (the two judging functions), and between judging and perceiving (the two attitudes to the outside world). Preference between the two orientations is assessed by questions like: Do you: (1) talk easily to almost anyone for as long as you have to (extraversion) or (2) find a lot to say only to certain people or under certain conditions (introversion)? Preference between the two perceiving functions is assessed by questions like: Do you usually get along better with: (1) imaginative people (intuition), or (2) realistic people (sensing)? Preference between the two judging functions is assessed by questions like: Do you usually: (1) value sentiment more

than logic (feeling), or (2) value logic more than sentiment (thinking)? Preference between the two attitudes to the outer world is assessed by questions like: Do you prefer to: (1) arrange dates, parties, etc. well in advance (judging) or (2) be free to do whatever feels like fun when the time comes (perceiving)? Francis and Jones (1999) provided broad support for the reliability and validity of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator within a church-related context. Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley, and Slater (2007) reported the following alpha coefficients in a study among 863 Anglican clergy: introversion .79, extraversion .80, intuition .82, sensing .87, feeling .72, thinking .79, perceiving .86, and judging .85.

### **Participants**

- insert table 1 about here -

The programme was attended by 23 Anglican clergy, 11 men and 12 women, of whom two were in their twenties, four in their thirties, seven in their forties, seven in their fifties, and three in their sixties. Table 1 presents the psychological type profile of the 23 participants. This table uses the conventional format employed in the international literature for presenting psychological type data in order to facilitate comparison with other studies in the field. The key information for the present study conveyed by that table concerns the dichotomous type preferences, the dominant types, and the sixteen complete types. The dichotomous type preferences describe a group in which there are more extraverts (13) than introverts (11), more intuitive types (13) than sensing types (10), more feeling types (14) than thinking types (9), and more judging types (13) than perceiving types (10). The dominant type preferences show the following pattern: intuition (9), sensing (5), feeling (5) and thinking (4). Of the sixteen complete types, the most frequently occurring types are INFJ (3), ENFP (3) and ESFJ (3).

### **Analysis**

The education groups (structured first according to preferences on the perceiving process and second according to preferences on the judging process) were assigned specific tasks (defined below) and asked to go to breakout rooms. There they were invited to work on their tasks and to agree on a common presentation of their conclusions. The two authors individually attended the highest scoring sensing group and the highest scoring intuitive group for the first task, and the highest scoring feeling group and the highest scoring thinking group for the second task. They took careful note of the conversation within the group. The results section of this paper provides an analysis based on these notes.

## **Results**

### **Perceiving process**

The participants were divided into three groups: seven participants who recorded highest preference scores on sensing (37, 35, 35, 31, 25, 25, 23), eight participants who recorded highest preference scores on intuition (45, 41, 41, 41, 39, 37, 37, 31), and six participants who recorded lower preference scores on intuition together with two participants who recorded lower preference scores on sensing. The participants were invited to read Mark 10: 46-52 (see Appendix 1) and then to address the following questions: What do you see in the narrative; and what sparks your imagination? How would you preach about it? The following analysis concentrates on the two groups that contained the highest preference scores on sensing and the highest preference scores on intuition.

### ***Sensing***

The high scoring sensing group approached the task in a disciplined way. They read the passage aloud. They reflected on the task that they had been asked to undertake. They appointed one of their number to take notes and to report back. Then they agreed that they would work individually for ten minutes examining the passage before sharing their ideas with each other.

When they engaged in conversation the high scoring sensing group began by examining whether this passage of scripture really provided a good fit for Disability Awareness Sunday. Their hesitation about the passage concerned the confusion of the two ideas of healing from disability and forgiveness of sins. Such confusion of ideas might send out a confused message for disabled members of the congregation.

The second task of the high scoring sensing group was to listen carefully to the details of the passage and to make sure that the details were carefully and properly noted. They found the passage to be very rich in detail. The blind man was the centre of attention in the narrative. His name was well known, a Jewish man, the Son of Timaeus, or in Hebrew Bartimaeus. There was a large crowd there and Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside. Not only could he not see what was going on, sitting there at the feet of the crowd, he had become invisible. What Bartimaeus could not achieve with his eyes, he achieved with his voice. He may have been invisible but he was not inaudible. When others told him to shut up he cried out all the more. He was not content for his disability to remain invisible.

Bartimaeus' words were important words. They recognised who Jesus is and they formed a liturgical plea: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. Son of David is a Messianic shout and prepares the way for the royal proclamation on Palm Sunday. The detail here is important.

The fact that Bartimaeus threw off his coat is an important detail too. As a beggar this may have been his only possession; as a blind man he would never have been able to find it again; but with his sight restored that would not matter.

Jesus' words in this story were important too. Jesus took nothing for granted and asked Bartimaeus what he wanted before he acted. 'What do you want me to do for you?', Jesus asked. Jesus took nothing for granted and explained what had transpired, 'Your faith has healed you.'

For the high scoring sensing group every detail was important. The group noted the effect Jesus had on the crowd. They had been hostile to Bartimaeus: they had rebuked him and told him to be quiet. After Jesus had spoken to them, they had encouraged Bartimaeus to jump to it and get to Jesus. They also noted the effect Jesus had on Bartimaeus himself. At the beginning of the story he was sitting blind at the roadside; at the end of the story he was following Jesus along the road.

The high scoring sensing group concluded the session by turning attention away from the passage of scripture to the disabled people to whom they might be preaching on Disability Awareness Sunday. One member of the group rooted this issue in her personal experience of illness and incapacity. The context of the people in the local congregation was important to the group as much as the detail and the content of the passage of scripture from which they were invited to preach.

While this group of high scoring sensing types had been invited to address two questions, they had become so engrossed in the first (What do you see in this narrative?), that they had failed to hear and to respond to the second (What sparks your imagination?).

### ***Intuition***

The high scoring intuitive group approached the task in a thoughtful way. They read the passage aloud and then lapsed into silence. Out of the silence came a series of imaginative but unrelated ideas.

Here was a story about a blind man. The association for the first person who spoke was with a recent in-service training programme that had been addressed by the chaplain to the deaf. The link had been made between blindness and deafness. What had stayed in his mind from that day was the suggestion that we should test the assumption that all deaf people want to hear. That, said the chaplain to the deaf, is not always the case. Jesus, too, did not

make the assumption that blind Bartimaeus wanted to see. Jesus asked him first. Jesus listened to his story.

The mention of the chaplain to the deaf sparked in another participant's mind memory of a recent television comedy about life in a hospital. There a deaf person protested to the doctor that he would rather die than be made to hear. That deaf person exalted living in a world of silence.

The image of the deaf man really not wanting to hear sparked another idea of how Jesus' healing of the blind man really changed his life. Here was someone who had been sitting on the pavement begging who now literally had to stand on his own feet and had to take his chances in the market place to get and to hold down a job. He may have been better off not seeing.

This idea prompted further reflection on what disability means. It is too easy only to see the disability and not to see the person. It is too easy to see only the wheelchair. There is a sense in which we are all disabled, looked past, talked past, not really seen for who we are.

This prompted a further idea concerning the way in which some disabilities are more visible than others, some more acceptable than others. At this point a father spoke of his autistic son. He was not sure that his son saw this as a disability or that he would want to be healed from his autism.

A new line of thought was introduced with reference to the Paralympics. Here is an occasion that celebrates disability and demonstrates high levels of achievement among those labelled as disabled. Mention of the Paralympics led to a new train of thought on the persistence of disability within the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, the deaf will still be deaf, but nonetheless whole. In the Kingdom of God, the blind will still be blind, but nonetheless whole. In the Kingdom of God, the paralysed will still be paralysed, but nonetheless whole.

Another member of the group, however, challenged this interpretation. He affirmed belief in a God who heals today, and he goes on praying for the cancer to go away.

Suddenly a new idea emerged, giving attention to the people in the crowd who rebuked the blind man and who told him to be quiet. The danger is that the church today may wish to subdue and to marginalise the voice of its disabled members. Only the call to return to the plenary session halted the flow of further ideas.

While the group of high scoring intuitive types had been invited to address two questions, they had become so engrossed in the second (What sparks your imagination?), that they had failed to address the first in a systematic way (What do you see in the narrative?). What they saw was as a direct consequence of the links that had been sparked by this imagination.

### **Judging process**

The participants were divided into three groups: nine participants who recorded highest preference scores on feeling (39, 39, 35, 33, 33, 23, 21, 21, 21), seven participants who recorded highest preference scores on thinking (41, 15, 9, 7, 5, 5, 5), and five participants who recorded lower preference scores on feeling together with two participants who recorded lower preference scores on thinking. The participants were invited to read Mark 2: 1-12 (see Appendix 2) and then to address the following questions: What issues does this passage raise for you? How would you preach about it? The following analysis concentrates on the two groups that contained the highest preference scores on feeling and the highest preference scores on thinking.

### ***Feeling***

The high scoring feeling group read the passage aloud and engaged in conversation immediately. There was a clear unease about the passage, and as they began to explore their feelings, the following reactions emerged. The passage did not feel right for Disability



Awareness Sunday. It sent out the wrong messages to disabled people. The high scoring feeling types would prefer either to find another passage of scripture for the Gospel reading, or to find someone else to preach on the passage. They were really concerned for the feelings of the people who would be listening. The passage seemed to send out all the wrong messages about how the church should deal with disability.

The problem arises from speaking about healing and the forgiveness of sins at the same time and in the same breath. How does this make disabled people feel who are not healed and who cannot pick up their mat and walk? Does it make them feel like bad and unforgiven sinners? What on earth would the church be thinking of selecting this passage, of all passages, for Disability Awareness Sunday?

This made the high scoring feeling group reflect on the people who would attend church on Disability Awareness Sunday. Is this a Sunday when the church is filled with people in wheel chairs and with people suffering from a range of other disabilities and illnesses? Would such people come seeking healing? So what has the church really got to offer to such people? Such questions proved increasingly uncomfortable for the group and there was a clear need to lighten the conversation.

The conversation moved on from there to consider the real heroes of the story, the four friends who carried the stretcher, climbed on to the roof and went out of their way to bring the paralysed person to Jesus. Here is a fine story of human compassion, of commitment and of responsibility. Here is the example all Christians are called to follow. We are called to care for others and to carry them to Jesus in prayer.

Concern for the four friends inspired further reflection. The high scoring feeling group tried to get inside the heart of these people and to share their experience. It was these four friends who changed the life of the paralysed man. The group was left feeling concern

for these four friends. How did they feel at the end of the day? Jesus seems to have ignored them and the healed man just got up and walked away, leaving them to fix the roof.

The high scoring feeling group was not just concerned to get inside the experience of the four friends, they were also concerned about the crowd. The crowd were so unfeeling and insensitive to the paralysed man. They had literally squeezed him out and kept him at arms length from Jesus. There is a danger that the church today can act in the same way and make people feel pushed away from Jesus' welcome. The church can make people feel excluded, not just in terms of disability, but in terms of features like ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and mental health issues. Disability Awareness Sunday should widen its perspective to focus on exclusion?

The high scoring feeling group were also concerned to understand the motivation of the teachers of the law. Here were people so concerned with matters of principle that their hearts were left untouched by the paralysed man resting on the ground before them. Perhaps sometimes we can be like that too.

Towards the end of the session the high scoring feeling group returned to the core problem of the passage and began to wrestle again with the problems that the passage raised. Whatever they were to preach on the passage would need to be grounded in a clear affirmation of God's love for all people.

### ***Thinking***

The thinking group read the passage aloud, and began to identify the issues raised by the passage, beginning with some levity. The story itself raises clear issues about disabled access and health and safety. No church should get away today with making it so difficult for disabled people to get close to Jesus, or with allowing such unrestricted access to the roof.

The more serious issues, however, were identified as Jesus' attitude to disability, the connection between disability and sin, the place of disability in the restored Kingdom of God,

Jesus' self-understanding, and the explanation for God creating a world in which disability has such a prominent place.

For the thinking group, Jesus' attitude toward disability in the synoptic gospels is puzzling. In this passage, as elsewhere in the synoptic tradition, Jesus routinely transforms disability into wholeness. Here he makes the lame to walk. Elsewhere he makes the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. In the synoptic tradition he even brings life to the dead, as in the case of Jairus' daughter. But in the time of Jesus there were many lame people to whom Jesus did not grant the gift of mobility, many blind people to whom Jesus did not grant the gift of sight, many deaf people to whom Jesus did not grant the gift of hearing, and many dead children whom Jesus did not raise to life. In the Johannine tradition there is a clear expectation that signs of physical transformation were to be read as significant signs of theological input. In the synoptic tradition the miracles are more ambiguous, except at the point when the significance of Jesus' actions are pointed out to the disciples of John and conveyed back to John in person.

For the thinking group, the connection between disability and sin remains a live theological issue in the church today. In this narrative Jesus seems to make a very clear and explicit link between disability and sin: the phrases 'Your sins are forgiven' and 'Get up, take your mat and go' are regarded as synonymous. Yet if this is so, the implications are profound and crucial for those Christian believers whose disability is not healed. One of the group recounted his experience as a student suffering from concussion after an accident. The next day, when he was still suffering the effects of concussion, a member of the Christian Union came to pray over him and advised him to repent of his sins. Another member of the group recalled Professor John Hull's book, *Touching the Rock*. This autobiographical book reported John's experience of being challenged by an evangelical Christian to acknowledge that his failure to receive healing from God was a clear indication of his lack of faith.

For the thinking group, the passage raised a real question about whether disability has a place in the restored Kingdom of God. For some of the group the passage suggested that there was no place for disability where God reigns. Jesus just appears to eradicate disability: the paralysed man was sent out walking.

For the thinking group, Jesus' pronouncement focused the Christological question, the question about Jesus' self-understanding. To pronounce the forgiveness of sins is God's job and Jesus confidently takes that role into his own hands. If Jesus had falsely claimed that authority he could have been taken outside and stoned for blasphemy.

For the thinking group the passage also raised the core theological problem about the explanation for a world in which disability has such a prominent place. One member of the group drew on his own experience as the father of a disabled child. This experience had made him think deeply about the wide range of disabilities that he recognised in the world around him and the wide range of implications that different disabilities carried for individuals and also for those who supported them. Here is a problem with which he grapples daily but without finding a satisfactory answer.

At the end of the session the thinking group re-visited the urgency of needing to get a message prepared for Disability Awareness Sunday. The mood lightened at the end, as it had right at the beginning. One voice suggested that the best strategy would be to choose a different bible passage. Another voice suggested the strategy of dodging the serious issues and focusing instead on the role of the friends. It was the friends who supported the disabled man. We should do likewise.

### **Conclusion**

Drawing on insights from the reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics in general and the SIFT approach in particular, this study has documented how the psychological type characteristics of the preacher may influence the ways in which two

passages of Mark's Gospel, identified as appropriate for Disability Awareness Sunday, may be read, interpreted and proclaimed. In so doing the study has built on a series of earlier studies and added new scientific evidence to support the claim that the psychological type preferences of the reader play an important part in shaping the dialogue between the text and the reader, or indeed between the Word of God and the People of God. The findings from the present study lead to five general conclusions regarding this particular approach to the science of biblical hermeneutics and to some recommendations specific to ways of enabling preachers to respond creatively and sensitively to scripture readings commended for Disability Awareness Sunday.

The first general conclusion concerns how biblical interpretation can be shaped by distinguishing between the kind of questions that draw on the perceiving process and the kind of questions that draw on the judging process. In the present exercise the perceiving process was engaged by posing questions that gave priority to seeing and to envisioning what is there to discover in the text. The participants were asked: What do you see in the narrative; and what sparks your imagination? In the present exercise the judging process was engaged by posing questions that gave priority to evaluating and to analysing the text. The participants were asked: What issues does the passage raise for you? Clearly different questions bring different psychological processes into play.

The second general conclusion concerns how the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) hear and respond to the same perceiving questions in very different ways. Instinctively sensing types examine the details of the passage with energy and enthusiasm, but they are quite reluctant to lift their vision too far above the page and to seek the wider associations and connections. God is found to speak in the detail of the passage rather than through the themes and ideas to which the passage may give rise. Instinctively intuitive types allow their imagination to be sparked by the passage with energy and enthusiasm, but they

are quite reluctant to pay close attention to what is actually on the page. God is found to speak in the big themes and in the imaginative ideas generated by the passage rather than through giving too much attention to the details.

The third general conclusion concerns how the two judging functions (thinking and feeling) hear and respond to the same judging questions in very different ways. Instinctively thinking types latch onto the analysis and principles that are of primary interest to them, and they may inadvertently overlook the deeply human and personal implications for the people affected by these principles. Instinctively feeling types latch onto the personal and interpersonal implications for those whose lives are touched by the issues and principles, and may prefer not to press the issues and principles too far or too hard. There in the background thinking types may be modelling their approach on the God of justice while feeling types may be modelling their approach on the God of mercy.

The fourth general conclusion concerns how the experience of working in type alike groups proved to be energising for the participants. When working in mixed type groups (which is our usual experience) it is all too easy to become deflected from implementing our individual strengths. The opportunity for individuals who share the same psychological type preference to work together encourages and resources the participants with the consequence that their preferred function performs at its best. This is itself an educational activity that can enrich preachers by helping them to become more aware of their preferences and strengths.

The fifth general conclusion is that the real educational experience begins to take root after the type-alike groups have done their work. The real work began when the individual groups reported back in plenary. In this context the sensing types and the intuitive types listened to each other's interpretations of Mark 10: 46-52. They were surprised by what the other group had seen and by what they themselves had missed. The group of high scoring intuitive types had not read their passage closely enough to note that Bartimaeus had taken

off his cloak. The group of high scoring sensing types had not seen or anticipated the many links that seemed so obvious to the intuitive types. They had not glimpsed the Paralympics running through the streets of Jericho. The feeling types and the thinking types listened to each other's interpretations of Mark 2: 1-12. They were surprised by the different perspectives that emerged in these different groups. The group of high scoring feeling types were amazed how insensitive the thinking types could be at times to the issues that mattered to the lives of the disabled people in their congregations. The high scoring thinking types were amazed by the reluctance of the feeling types to grasp the nettle and to identify the principles at stake. There may be real value then for Christian education to provide opportunities for people who read the Word of God differently to speak with each other about what they hear. For in this way the conversation between the Word of God and the People of God is enriched and God's rich revelation may be more richly received by God's People.

These general conclusions, arising from the findings of the present study, carry particular implications for ways in which the professional development of preachers may be advanced in relation to sensitive and controversial issues regarding which there may be diversity of opinion within the Christian community. Disability Awareness Sunday may be one of those occasions. The two specific passages of scripture explored by participants in the present project (the paralysed man lowered through the roof, and the blind man in Jericho) had both been recommended for services on Disability Awareness Sunday. The experiment described in the present paper demonstrated that these passages may be handled differently by different preachers not entirely on theological grounds but, at least partly, on psychological grounds. The passages raise profound issues about the Christian understanding of disability (especially physical paralysis and physical blindness) and about the Christian understanding of healing (especially as connected with the forgiveness of sin and with the possession of faith).

The four steps of the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching offers insight into how the same passages can be approached in distinctive ways and into how some readings may be vulnerable to unintended bias in the preachers' interpretation. A reading relying too heavily on sensing may fail to place the specific passage within the wider context of Christian ideas and themes. A reading relying too heavily on intuition may fail to give serious enough attention to the passage itself. A reading relying too heavily on thinking may fail to appreciate how a clinical analysis of the theological issues may leave untouched the human hearts of those personally suffering from disabilities. A reading relying too heavily on feeling may fail to appreciate how a sensitive emphasis on the pastoral care of the disabled may leave untouched the human minds of those properly wrestling with the problems of evil, sin and suffering.

Three recommendations for improving professional practice may flow from the foregoing observations. The first recommendation concerns the practice of individual preachers working in the isolation of their own study to prepare in advance for preaching on occasions like Disability Awareness Sunday. The framework of the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching may offer a helpful mechanism for ensuring that the text of scripture has been fully explored from the distinctive perspectives of sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking. The strengths of this structure have been illustrated by Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002) in their three-volume systematic approach to the principal Sunday Gospel lections proposed by the Revised Common Lectionary.

The second recommendation concerns the provision of training opportunities for preachers to meet together within preaching workshops structured on the basis of psychological type theory. The 23 Anglican clergy who participated during January 2015 in the workshop described in the present paper offer one example of a more general model of



continuing professional development available for preachers that could be promoted more widely.

The third recommendation concerns specifically the provision of materials to resource preaching on Disability Awareness Sunday. Perhaps the websites that so helpfully identify relevant and appropriate scripture readings for Disability Awareness Sunday may find it helpful also to offer some reflection drawing on the diverse perspectives of the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching in order to help preachers view the potential within these passages as widely as possible.

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## Appendix 1

**Mark 10: 46-52****The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus**

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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## Appendix 2

**Mark 2: 1-12****Jesus Heals a Paralytic**

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the paralytic— ‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’ And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’

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Table 1

*Type distribution Anglican clergy participants*

The Sixteen Complete Types				Dichotomous Preferences	
ISTJ <i>n</i> = 2 (8.7%) +++++	ISFJ <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	INFJ <i>n</i> = 3 (13.0%) +++++	INTJ <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	E <i>n</i> = 13 (56.5%)	I <i>n</i> = 10 (43.5%)
				S <i>n</i> = 10 (43.5%)	N <i>n</i> = 13 (56.5%)
				T <i>n</i> = 9 (39.1%)	F <i>n</i> = 14 (60.9%)
				J <i>n</i> = 13 (56.5%)	P <i>n</i> = 10 (43.5%)
ISTP <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	ISFP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	INFP <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	INTP <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	Pairs and Temperaments	
				IJ <i>n</i> = 7 (30.4%)	IP <i>n</i> = 3 (13.0%)
				EP <i>n</i> = 7 (30.4%)	EJ <i>n</i> = 6 (26.1%)
				ST <i>n</i> = 4 (17.4%)	SF <i>n</i> = 6 (26.1%)
				NF <i>n</i> = 8 (34.8%)	NT <i>n</i> = 5 (21.7%)
ESTP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	ESFP <i>n</i> = 2 (8.7%) +++++	ENFP <i>n</i> = 3 (13.0%) +++++	ENTP <i>n</i> = 2 (8.7%) ++++	SJ <i>n</i> = 7 (30.4%)	SP <i>n</i> = 3 (13.0%)
				NP <i>n</i> = 7 (30.4%)	NJ <i>n</i> = 6 (26.1%)
				TJ <i>n</i> = 5 (21.7%)	TP <i>n</i> = 4 (17.4%)
				FP <i>n</i> = 6 (26.1%)	FJ <i>n</i> = 8 (34.8%)
ESTJ <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	ESFJ <i>n</i> = 3 (13.0%) +++++	ENFJ <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	ENTJ <i>n</i> = 1 (4.3%) ++++	IN <i>n</i> = 6 (26.1%)	EN <i>n</i> = 7 (30.4%)
				IS <i>n</i> = 4 (17.4%)	ES <i>n</i> = 6 (26.1%)
				ET <i>n</i> = 4 (17.4%)	EF <i>n</i> = 9 (39.1%)
				IF <i>n</i> = 5 (21.7%)	IT <i>n</i> = 5 (21.7%)

  

Jungian Types (E)			Jungian Types (I)			Dominant Types		
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
E-TJ	2	8.7	I-TP	2	8.7	Dt.T	4	17.4
E-FJ	4	17.4	I-FP	1	4.3	Dt.F	5	21.7
ES-P	2	8.7	IS-J	3	13.0	Dt.S	5	21.7
EN-P	5	21.7	IN-J	4	17.4	Dt.N	9	39.1

Note: N = 23 (NB: + = 1% of N)