

When in doubt, listen

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Preaching transfiguration can be confusing. What's this "minor festival" really about?

On one level, it's the culmination of the season of Epiphany, and certainly Jesus' transfiguration provides a climactic revelation that characterizes the season. On another, it leads us into Lent, as both the descent down the mountain and Jesus' words about his immanent death indicate. And on yet a third level, there's a foreshadowing of Easter, as Jesus' dazzling white raiment foreshadows that of the messengers who will declare his resurrection.

So is the focus of the day on who Jesus is (Epiphany), where Jesus is going (Lent) or what he will become (Easter)?

Here's one more possibility: maybe transfiguration isn't quite as much about Jesus as we think. Maybe it's about us. Consider that the words spoken out of the cloud echo the words spoken at Jesus' baptism--except that this time they're spoken directly to the disciples. What's more, after identifying Jesus as the beloved son, the voice offers the disciples one clear instruction: "Listen to him."

I think that's pretty good advice for disciples today. Listen to him. Listen to what he says, watch where he goes, follow him down this mountain.

I don't know, of course, what that will mean for those of you who are preaching on this sometimes confusing day. Nor do you know entirely what it will mean for your listeners as they navigate this often confusing life.

I do know, though, that it's still what we are commanded to do: Listen to him. I think maybe that's what congregations are for--to help us figure out exactly what listening to Jesus means in our individual and corporate lives. What if we knew that each week we would be gathering again with people committed to listening to Jesus, people who wanted to help each other figure out what this means and encourage each other to do it?

This might make coming down off the mountain a whole lot easier.