



Sermon by Lindon J. Eaves on the Sunday of Transfiguration 2008

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Hebrews 12:18. "It is not to the tangible, blazing fire of Sinai that you have come, with its darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, its trumpet-blast and oracular voice...No, you have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels."

My bedtime reading recently has been a subversive little book called *Flock of Dodos*. The full title is "*Flock of Dodos: Behind Modern Creationism, Intelligent Design and the Easter Bunny*" by Jon Alston and Barrett Brown. Jon Alston teaches sociology of religion at Texas A&M. Among other things, Barrett Brown has written for *National Lampoon* and *Playboy*. It is a biting satirical attack on two themes in much of American religion and culture today. The first is the specious pretension of Intelligent Design. The second is myth of the "Judeo-Christian" origin of American culture and values. The former it combats with science, the latter from the writings of the Founding Fathers: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, John Adams and so on. All of these American heroes were adamant that Christianity, like all other world religions, is little better than superstition and that their new nation would better be founded on the principles of Enlightenment. Among other things, they reproduce a quotation from Abraham Lincoln:

"My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of scriptures have become clearer and stronger with advancing years and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them."

So much for being a Christian nation: "I have sworn upon the altar of God" writes Jefferson "eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." Religion is, or can become, one more expression of tyranny.

I was also amused that the authors quote from the treaty of Tripoli ratified by Congress in 1797, to the effect that, since one religion is pretty much like another, and America isn't designed to be Christian anyway, there is absolutely no reason why Americans and Arabs shouldn't be friends.

It's an annoying book, but also a refreshing book because it is concerned about truth. Truth is hard. It is inconvenient.

There are lots of books attacking religion right now. Richard Dawkins' latest, "The God Delusion" is even advertised on television. Atheism sells.

And so it should. In many ways, *Flock of Dodos* and *The God Delusion* have seized the mantle of the Old Testament prophets who challenged the cultural assumptions of their day. I bet Amos, or Jeremiah, or first Isaiah were greeted with the same "ouch" in their day that greets Dawkins or *Flock of Dodos* in ours. We are sometimes so much inside our own religion and culture, that we cannot see what's wrong with it. "O wad some Power the giftie gie us To see oursels as ithers see us!" said Rabbie Burns.

The resurgence of atheism offers just that. It is a challenge to see "oursels as ithers see us": to try to find a vantage point to view the human anthill through the window of eternity.

In recent decades we have see the "dot com" bubble and the "housing bubble" driven more by pious hope and grandiose expectations than the underlying truth. I reckon we are also in the middle of a "god-bubble". Instead of the cross, the god of the bubble offers a gospel of prosperity. He wants his priests to be rich. He demands superstition in place of science, moral condemnation in place of loving welcome. His interests coincide closely with mine. He appeals to my most vulgar emotions and exploits my basest motives. He never questions *me*. It's other people he's not too fond of. He doesn't care much for the poor. His national interests coincide precisely with mine. He will use any means to spread his gospel of deceit from fudging the data to sending a tank.

This god is far too big and too noisy. I cannot fall in love with such a god. I cannot follow such a god.

I want a smaller God. I want a God who comes to me on the beach and asks me what I am doing. I want a God who excites my curiosity. I want a God who tells me something I don't know already. I want a God who understands my life. A God who helps me with my hospital bills. Who knows what it is like to have no heat, no food, no husband, no job, no bed. I want a God who respects my intellect. I want a God who will hold my hand when I am scared. I want a God who speaks gently. I want a God who will remember me when I am gone. I want a God who knows justice and has the purity to defend it. I want a God who can tell stories that make sense of my life. I want a God who can explain things to me. A God I want to hang out with. Maybe even a God I can have some fun with. I could love a God like that.

The gospels tell that such a little God once walked the earth. He came to me on the beach where I was mending the nets. He fascinated me. He made me think

thoughts I had never thought before. He led me to places I had never been before. He showed me the poor, the sick, the hungry and the outcast. He taught me how to love children. I met the soldier, the priest and the politician. He introduced me to people who had more money than they knew what to do with. He took me to weddings and funerals. He taught me about great wine. I went with him to dinner with some of the saddest people I have ever known. Sometimes I could not see him through the crowd. He taught me that there was always enough to go round. I watched him heal, embrace, forgive. I heard him teach. I saw lives changed. And was he smart! You should have heard the way he lit into the clergy. He gave me friends to care for me. He taught me to love.

Today, on this Sunday of Transfiguration, the glory and the greatness of this little God shines across time from the pages of the Gospel. What we see today is not "the tangible blazing fire" and earthquake of the old order. We are not called to bow down in fear before a god of thunder. The disciples of that god are legion. One day that bubble will burst. Instead, we have been seduced - seduced by a living and loving God who once walked upon the earth. The story of this little human God entices me also to live and love as he did. He whose love once was crucified by hate, now lives and reigns for ever. Amen.

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