



1 PETER 3:18

CHRIST ALSO
SUFFERED

Mark 1:9-15

Year B

Children are enamored by animals; many a committee tasked with decorating church nurseries opts for a Noah's Ark theme. In doing so, they forget while a pair of each species of animal is safely tucked away on the boat, God is busy destroying all of creation around them. The story of Noah's Ark is terrifying and hardly child-friendly. But its resolution is worth exploring with young disciples because it presents a remorseful, loving God who commits to the preservation of creation. In this lesson, children will explore the story of God's covenant with God's people through Noah and will consider what God's promise to never again destroy creation means.

- This reading comes from the Old Testament book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.
- This reading is "part 2" of the story often called "Noah's Ark." If you are offering the reading from a children's Bible that includes the first part of the story (God warning Noah of God's intention to destroy creation and begin again) be sure to share this part of the story. Alternatively, you can offer a short retelling of the first part of the story or ask children to share what they know about Noah's Ark.
- In the story, God makes a covenant with God's people through Noah. Share a brief definition of "covenant" with the children. If your congregation uses a particular language, use that with the group. If not, you can offer a simple definition such as "a covenant is a special promise that involves God."

Read aloud Genesis 9:8-17.

After reading, have the children wonder:

- I wonder why God said God would promise to never again destroy the creation ...
- I wonder why God chose the rainbow as a symbol for this promise ...
- I wonder how God shows you God keeps this promise

In Robert Frost's poem "[Mending Wall](#)" two rural neighbors meet in the spring to repair a stone wall between their properties, damaged by weather and local hunters. One of the neighbors, the poem's speaker, doubts that their wall is necessary. All he has are apple trees. But the man on the other side is insistent, quoting the proverb: "Good walls make good neighbors."

On this first Sunday of Lent, we are reminded of a God who not only can't be contained or kept away by walls, but also of a God who actively breaks these barriers down. In [Preaching Mark in Two Voices](#), co-written by Gary Charles and Brian Blount, Blount describes Jesus' baptism as the moment when "a wild, untamed God" is set loose in the world, like a tiger released from the zoo. In the Bible, Blount reminds us, heaven is a buffer zone, a wall that "one great power uses to separate itself from another great power." Like the tiger's cage, the heavens provide a way for us to be in contact with God but not fear God's power.

"The ancient Hebrews believed that no human could look upon God and live," Blount writes. "God was too holy, too bright, too powerful. Thank heavens, then, for the heavens. It was the heavens that kept us separate from God, kept us from seeing God face to face."

All this changes in Mark 1:10. Here Mark uses the Greek word *schizo* (meaning "tear" "rip" or "rend") to describe how the heavens are torn apart as Jesus rises from the water of his baptism. Matthew and Luke choose the less intense, less violent Greek verb for "to open." Not Mark. According to Blount, "This is no quiet, gentle breeze ... this is the language of slashing and slicing, shredding and clawing until something once locked up safe ... knives its way free" through the heavens, through the safety buffer, to our human side.

If this isn't dramatic enough, then Blount describes the Spirit's "possession" of Jesus. English translators of Mark 1:10 timidly describe the Spirit as descending "on" Jesus, but Blount says the more accurate preposition is "into." "Even the buffer of Jesus' human being, his skin and bone, his human spirit and consciousness cannot stop God from moving into him in a way that makes the power that belongs to God the power that is going to be revealed in Jesus."

Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his boundary-breaking ministry. He gets started "immediately" as the Spirit drives him into the wilderness, after which he returns to break down the barriers between Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean, man and woman, rich and poor.

We, on the other hand, build walls.

We put more energy into building and maintaining walls to mark our boundaries and keep each other separate than we put into building relationships, diverse communities and just systems that remove the need for walls.

In Frost's poem, "Mending Wall," the speaker questions the unquestioned proverb, wondering why walls make good neighbors. Then he asks the question we should all ask ourselves: "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know/ What I was walling in or walling out."

Jesus' boundary-breaking ministry asks this question of us, too. The tearing open of the heavens at his baptism gives us a solid hint of God's answer.

Questions for reflection

1. What thoughts, images, feelings or ideas came to your mind as you read this passage?
2. What walls (metaphoric walls or literal) have you built in your life? What purpose do they serve? What were you walling in or walling out?
3. Do good walls make good neighbors? Why or why not?