

NAKED CRABS



At the seashore, every pool and puddle left by the retreating tide seems to have a crab in it. Little ones scuttle sideways, squeezing under rocks, peeking from a patch of seaweed, occasionally venturing out to nibble on unwary human toes.

Now and then, you may see bigger crabs, in deeper, safer pools. With ponderous majesty, they wave huge claws as a warning to stay away.

On the beach, shells of crabs lie washed up by waves. Some are from crabs that died. Others are simply discarded, a dwelling too small for its growing occupant. That's how crabs grow bigger... when their shells get too tight, they split the shell open and grow a new one.

I've never talked with a crab. But I imagine the process of splitting open a shell must be painful. I'm sure that until they grow a new shell, they feel terribly defenseless and vulnerable. Because that's how we feel when we crack open our shells.

Our shells aren't visible, like crabs'. But they are there, just the same, shells formed by years of habit, shells that protect us from other people, shells that are the roles we play as parents or children, or bosses, or employees.

Every now and then, we crack our shells open and emerge into a new world, quivering and defenseless.

In all traumas of life, a shell is being broken. A new, vulnerable life is started.

Like a crab, the longer that shell has been growing around us, the harder it is to break open, to start again. The more painful the breaking becomes.

We have worn some of our shells for generations. Our Christian faith can be a shell handed down by our ancestors. Some faith shells are worth keeping, while others may have become prisons—so encrusted with the barnacles of the past, so burdened with trailing weeks, so constricting, that we can no longer move when God calls.

No one looks for painful experiences, in life or in faith. To avoid pain, we may prefer to stay locked into shells that no longer fit very well, rather than risk the vulnerability of cracking them open.

But when a crab's shell becomes too thick, too protective, too tough to crack open and start again, the crab can't grow any more... and dies.