

## Shelly's Voice

On Sunday, Shelly Fitzgerald shared the story of what she's been through the past couple years and the spiritual lessons she's learned from that experience. (Note: The questions below were prepared based on an advance conversation with Shelly last week and, thus, might differ slightly from what you heard in Sunday's live interview. If Shelly said something on Sunday that really spoke to you, but is not covered here, feel free to raise it.)

1. Warm-up question: Shelly got to appear on the Ellen Show! So cool! If you could appear on a TV show – any show of any type – which would you want to be on?
2. Shelly grew up Catholic and graduated from Roncalli High School. After completing her education, she returned to Roncalli to serve as a Guidance Counselor and continued in that capacity for 15 years. It's a role she was passionate about. But Roncalli was more than just her place of employment, it was also her primary spiritual family. The majority of her colleagues had long known she was gay, including the principal. But then, in August of 2018, someone sent a copy of Shelly's certificate of marriage to the principal, who shared it with the Archbishop. Shelly was summoned to a meeting with the principal and president of her school. She was told she had three options: (a) resign, (b) dissolve her marriage; or (c) stay quiet and work until the end of the year. Shelly rejected options (a) and (b). Then a couple days later the school surprised her with a press release announcing to the world that she was banned from campus and placed on administrative leave for being married to a woman. Ultimately, they fired her. The story made national news and still is making waves.
  - a. Imagine yourself in Shelly's situation. In the first few days after all this hit the fan, what thoughts and feelings would be coursing through you?
  - b. When in your own life have you been stunned by a sudden change of events that turned your life upside down? What happened? How did it affect you?
3. Much of the conversation on Sunday focused on how Shelly's very-public termination, and all that's happened since, has affected her spiritual journey. Shelly shared several deep lessons. First, take a look at the cartoon reproduced on p. 3. It's kinda funny, but what's the serious message behind the humor?
4. Shelly specifically asked that we sing the song "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)" on Sunday. She heard that song sung on her first day at LifeJourney a few months before her termination. Let's read the Scripture on which the song is based: Matthew 14:22-33.
  - a. What are some key lessons we can learn from this Gospel story?
  - b. Now read the lyrics to "Oceans" printed on p. 3. Note the first verse of the song: "You call me out upon the waters, the great unknown where feet may fail, and

there I find you in the mystery, in oceans deep.” Do you think that’s true? Is Jesus calling you into deeper waters? Is that where you’re most apt to find him?

- c. Re-read the last verse of the song. Is that a prayer you are personally willing to pray? Why or why not?
5. Shelly also selected the Scripture we read aloud on Sunday. Let’s read it again: II Corinthians 12:7-10. Notice two key phrases: “God’s power is made perfect in weakness” (vs. 9), and “For whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” Why does it work this way? What’s the correlation between our weakness and God’s ability to flow through us?
6. Shelly has lost the faith community of her youth. Many former friends no longer speak to her. That’s been painful. But she shared an anonymous quote that resonates with her: “It is painful when God is leading you to a place where other people who have been important on your journey cannot follow. Don’t judge them, nor judge where you have been. God was ‘back there’ too and still is. Don’t let your heart be arrogant now. But also ... don’t stop walking.” What speaks to you in this?
7. Shelly said that finding LifeJourney as her new spiritual home has been huge in her spiritual growth. She said she used to be envious of people who were really passionate about their faith, but now she says, “I’m so engaged with my faith.” Why is active participation in a spiritual community so critical to our spiritual growth?
8. Shelly said, “I really believe this didn’t happen to me; it happened for me.” Her words echo Joseph’s words to his evil brothers in Genesis 50:20, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.” Based on what you heard on Sunday, in what ways has Shelly’s experience been good for her – and for others? When in your own life has God dramatically turned bad to good?
9. Finally, Shelly mentioned a story Pastor Jeff told a couple months ago about a time Wynton Marsalis was playing his saxophone in a club in New York City, just reaching the climax of the song, when someone’s cell phone began to ring, ruining the moment. But instead of freezing up, Marsalis started improvising, riffing on the ring tone melody, then weaving it back into the original song in a *tour de force*. Shelly said, “I’ve really come to believe that God works with us like that. God is not walking behind me, God is not walking in front of me, God is walking beside me. I make a move, God makes a move. Life is like a dance with God.” In your own life right now, what unpleasant disruptions may be trying to call you deeper into God?
10. Since her termination, Shelly has had incredible opportunities to be a prophetic voice for change in the church and in our culture. Her impact has been amazing! When speaking to fellow advocates, Shelly encourages us to engage our opponents with great kindness and love, rather than anger and superiority. Do you think that’s good advice? Why or why not?

***Be sure to check out ShellysVoice.org.***



### Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)

You call me out upon the waters  
 The great unknown where feet may fail  
 And there I find You in the mystery  
 In oceans deep  
 My faith will stand

And I will call upon Your name  
 And keep my eyes above the waves  
 When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace  
 For I am Yours and You are mine

Your grace abounds in deepest waters  
 Your sovereign hand  
 Will be my guide  
 Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me  
 You've never failed and You won't start now

So I will call upon Your name  
 And keep my eyes above the waves  
 When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace  
 For I am Yours and You are mine

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders  
 Let me walk upon the waters  
 Wherever You would call me  
 Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander  
 And my faith will be made stronger  
 In the presence of my Savior