

Two friends were out fishing in a boat on a beautiful summer day. No one else was even on the lake. The one baited his hook, threw it into the water and watched his bobber sit on the waves. Suddenly there was a loud explosion from the other side of the boat. Fish began floating to the surface and were scooped up in a net by the other.

He was just about to ask his friend what had happened, when he saw him light a stick of dynamite, throw it in the water, causing another loud explosion. *“What are you doing?”* he shouted. *“Fishing!”* was the reply. *“You can’t do that. It’s illegal.”* Just then, his buddy lit another stick of dynamite threw into his lap and said: *“Are you gonna talk, or are you gonna fish?”*

Fishing is the most popular form of recreation in our country. Some fish in the summer ..... some in the winter ..... some do both. Almost everyone has fished at least once - even if someone else put the worm on the hook, and removed the hook from the fish’s mouth.

Jesus liked to use familiar things like fishing to teach some wonderful things. During today’s fishing outing on the Sea of Galilee, he wants to teach us that the best fishing isn’t done in a lake or a river, but in a person’s heart, as we consider **Three Divine Fish Stories!**

**1) The Ones that Got Away .....** Peter, James and John didn’t fish for recreation. It was their livelihood. They’d been fishing all day and hadn’t caught a thing. They were tired

and frustrated. They just wanted to get to shore, clean their nets and be done for the day. As they beached their boats they weren't talking about what great fishermen they were. They were talking about the ones that got away.

Since this is a divine fish story, Jesus is going to teach us something more important than fish getting away from us. He's going to talk to us about something else that often gets away from us but really shouldn't - time spent listening to God’s, thinking about it and applying it to our lives.

On the Sea of Galilee shoreline something else is going on. Crowds gathered to listen to the young prophet from Nazareth preach.

What did he preach about?

- Maybe he used the uncertainty of a fishermen’s catch to talk about the uncertainties humans face in life. And only God's Word is certain and reliable.
- Maybe the fishermen’s failure to catch fish led him to talk about the sinful failure of humans to earn salvation for themselves. Only God's grace saves and never fails.
- Perhaps Jesus pointed to the beautiful scenery surrounding them, and shared how, as the Son of God, he had a hand in creating all of it. Only Jesus has a hand in each of our lives every day.
- Perhaps Jesus explained how only God's love for sinners removes sins as far as the east sunrise is from the west sunset.

From this seaside vantage point we see how God's Word speaks to us whether we're relaxing at the beach, or experiencing life's failures and frustrations. If we don't want life to get away from us, especially eternal life, we can't afford to let any opportunities to listen and learn God's Word get away from us.

## **2) The Ones that Didn't Get Away .....**

Peter, James and John had gotten a front row seat to the finest preaching anyone had ever heard. The sermon was over and the crowd had gone home, and Peter is ready to call it a day. But Jesus wasn't. He told Simon, **"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."**

Since Jesus was the carpenter and Peter was the fisherman, Peter tried to reason with him: **"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything."** Peter knew two things: This is the wrong time of day and the wrong part of the lake to do any fishing. Finally, Peter went along with it: **"But because you say so, I will let down the nets."**

Do you want to talk about a fish story? Here you go: **"They caught so many fish that their nets began to break. Their partners in the other boat came to help, but both boats began to sink."**

They'd caught their share of fish in their day but this was unheard of. They'd caught fish in a place and at a time they never should have. These are the ones that didn't get away!

But there's more. Peter realized this Jesus is no ordinary preacher. He heard the crowds shout: *"You are the Son of God!"* And now, you can tell he believes it himself. He's scared. He falls at Jesus' knees pleading with him: **"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man."**

Here's the One who first created fish, now he's directing some fish to fill their nets. If he knew those fish were going to go into their nets, he also knew Peter's doubts, his faults and his sins. Jesus must get away from him. Peter's not worthy to be in Jesus' presence.

But this is the story of the ones who didn't get away. Jesus wouldn't get away from Peter, because Jesus didn't want Peter to get away from him, that why Jesus said: **"Don't be afraid."** Jesus wanted Peter to trust him and follow him and never get away from him as his disciple.

If we thought about the awesome power of Jesus, we, too would say: *"Go away from me Lord; I'm a sinner."* But we sometimes shrink God down to our size: *"Lord, you just don't know what it's like to live in a high tech world of computers and respirators, abortion and evolution. Your commandments seem out of touch. Nothing is certain and absolute anymore."*

So we make our decisions how to act with the opposite sex, how to resolve our marital difficulties, how to treat our children or parents, on how we feel, rather than what the Lord has told us in his Word.

When we recognize our sinful ways, we can only say, *"Lord, get away from me."* But God has no intention of getting away from us. He tells us: *"Don't be afraid. No matter what sins you've committed, I came to take them all away. Trust in my forgiveness. There's no reason to leave me, follow me as my disciple."*

Since Jesus promises not to let his grace get away from us, let's resolve to follow Jesus more closely, with more trust, more love, more joy and greater obedience.

### **3) The Ones that Must Not Get Away .....**

Now Jesus talks of the ones that must not get away, when he tells Peter, **"From now on you will catch men."** I prefer the translation "Fishers-of-Men." It sounds neater. Those that don't know Jesus as their Savior are the fish Peter must now catch for Christ.

We live in a society that would rather be fishing, hunting, recreating, traveling, relaxing ..... whatever. While these things are fine, there's something more important, and we need to be honest with ourselves and understand that. Souls need to be caught for Christ.

We know why these people must not get away. There's a real hell that awaits those who die with sins unrepented of and unforgiven by Jesus. There are people we meet every day who are headed for that horrible future. They must not get away.

Jesus called Peter to fish for people. And he calls us to do the same. Afraid it won't be as exciting as fishing on Lake Michigan?

Remember one sinner reclaimed for heaven makes all of the angels sing for joy.

Yes, it might cost us a few fish fries to support outreach. And it might require some extra time in prayer, some special attention to a neighbor or co-worker, even a new attitude for someone of a different culture. But the salvation of a soul is priceless.