

# IT'S PARTY TIME!

Luke 15

*Preached by Carolyn Grohman at North Presbyterian Church, Williamsville  
September 9, 2007*

Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son all have a similar story line. Something of great value is lost, a search is conducted, and when whatever was lost is found, a great celebration takes place. A party is held. When the lost is found, it's time for a party!

The shepherd comes home with the lost sheep on his shoulders, calls together his friends and neighbors, and says to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." The woman finds her coin and calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." The father throws a huge party to celebrate his son's return, explaining that it is necessary to celebrate and rejoice because the son that was lost has been found. When the lost is found, it's what time? It's party time! Say it with me: *It's party time!*

I want to suggest to you this morning that it's time for a party, because the lost have been found. Now there are many ways to identify those who have been lost and are now found. For example, we could talk about those who had never believed in God or had never accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and who have now professed their belief and joined the church. Or we could talk about those who had been members of the church but had drifted away, and have now returned. Or we could talk about those who had thrown away their lives, like the prodigal son, in addiction to alcohol or other drugs or in a wild, promiscuous lifestyle, and have now found themselves, have cleaned up their act, and have returned to a moral, upright lifestyle. There are many ways in which we can identify the lost who have been found.

This morning I want to focus our celebration in a different direction, using the word "lost" in a lighter, less negative way. First, since this is Rally Day and the beginning of our Christian education program for the school year, I suggest to you that we think about the Sunday School classes and adult classes that had been lost to us during the summer and have now been found for the school year. And since we can't have classes without teachers, we gratefully remember the Sunday School teachers who have been found and have volunteered to teach this year. And of course, in order to have classes at all, we need students, so we celebrate the return of our children, youth, and adults, who had been lost to us during the summer break. I think it's time for a party. It's what time? *It's party time!*

But the celebration is not just because our Sunday School classes have resumed; it's also because the children have returned for the worship service. Those of you who have been here faithfully for worship throughout the summer know that on many Sundays we did not have many children in church. Most Sundays during the summer there were only a few children---if any---to call up front for the children's sermon. So I want to

celebrate the return of a large number of children in church, the children who had been lost to us during the summer but have now been found. So, it's what time? *It's party time!*

Something else that had been lost to us during part of the summer are the youth groups. Now of course the youth had several activities during the summer, culminating in their mission trip to Detroit and the Youth Triennium at Purdue University. But they took a summer vacation from their regular Sunday afternoon or evening meetings. Now they are ready to resume their full schedule. So what was lost during the summer break has now been found. Therefore, it's what time? *It's party time!*

Something else that had been lost to us during the summer is the choir. Now I know that the choir members, like the Sunday School teachers, need some time off; and I'm not for a moment suggesting that either the choir or the Sunday School continue through the summer. But I really miss the choir when they are not there. They not only provide an anthem each week, but also help in leading the congregational singing and in teaching new hymns and responses. I missed their leadership in worship during the summer. But the choir is now back. What was lost during the summer has been found. So, it's what time? *It's party time!*

Another thing that was lost during the summer is the regular routine of two worship services on Sunday mornings. Some of you prefer to come to the 8:30 service in the chapel, and some prefer the 10:45 service in the sanctuary. Beginning today, what was lost during the summer has been found. And therefore, it's what time? *It's party time!*

Another thing that had been lost to us because it had never existed and was actually found during the summer is a monthly, alternative worship service, called "casual worship." Many of you in this congregation had been asking for years for an additional, more contemporary worship service. When the Reverend Stuart Buisch joined our staff in February as our Pastor with Youth, we realized that he was the person to organize and lead this new service, which we are calling "casual worship." These services are held once a month on Sunday afternoon in Westminster Hall. Three casual worship services were held during the summer, with good response and good attendance. The next one is this afternoon at 5:00 in Westminster Hall, and you are all invited to come. What had been lost to us has now been found, so it's what time? *It's party time!*

Another thing that had been lost to us for several years but has recently been found is the Stephen Ministry program. North Church used to be a Stephen Ministry church, but for a number of reasons, that program was allowed to die. It was lost. But last year, through the leadership of Mary Lou George, our Director of Pastoral Care, the Stephen Ministry program was found, and in June we commissioned a new group of newly-trained Stephen Ministers. The lost program has been found! So, it's what time? *It's party time!*

One more thing that had been lost but has been found over the summer is the church's newly-renovated web page. Thanks to the hard work and the enormous time commitment of Jim McConnell, Brad Hahn, Kristi Rugg, Leigh Gaskill, Kathy Lash, Linda Donner, and several others on the Cyber Ministry Team, a new web page has been

created that is much more interactive, up-to-date, and user-friendly than the old web page, and it will soon include a chat page for youth. The lost has been found. So, it's what time? *It's party time!*

Now, to present an honest picture, I have to mention that there are a few things that are still lost and waiting to be found. For example, we need more Sunday School teachers. We have had to combine some of the classes this year for lack of teachers. And for Vacation Bible School this summer, we had to turn away a number of children because we did not have enough volunteers to staff additional classes. If you are willing and able to teach this year, please talk to Garidith Khayat.

Another area in which the lost need to be found is in recruiting additional people to serve on committees. Several of the committees---Worship, Property, Life-Long Learning, and Fellowship, to name just four---are looking for new members to replace long-time members who have moved away or just need some time off. If you are not currently serving on a committee and would like to, please talk to me or to any session member or put a note in the offering plate.

And finally, another area in which the lost need to be found is in regard to your financial support of this congregation and its ministry and mission. As you know, several very active families have moved away this summer, leaving a substantial financial deficit for this year. The session will soon be working on the budget for 2008, and in order to avoid having to make some cuts in staffing or program or mission, the session will be asking all of you to step up to the plate and increase your giving for the coming year. The lost givers need to be found!

Now even though there are some areas in our church life in which we still need to find the lost, nevertheless we have much to celebrate. Our educational program is back in full swing; the children and the choir are back in worship; the youth groups are functioning again; casual worship, the Stephen Ministry program, and the church's new web page are all up and running; and the Pastor Nominating Committee is moving forward by leaps and bounds in their search for a new pastor. We have much to celebrate. The lost have been found! And so, it's what time? *It's party time!*

Come to the party in Westminster Hall after this service and celebrate!

