Sunday, May 28, 1978
THE THREE R'S OF LIFE
Philippians 4:6-8

We've all heard of the basic three R's in education-- reading, 'riting and'rithmetic, and we're aware of their importance to our getting along in the world. They are often thought of as the basics in education. There is another set of three R's that not enough people are aware of and that are just as basic to all of our living. These three R's are not learned in any school, but are a part of the Christian faith. They help keep life in balance and in harmony. They are inter-related and each one is as important as the others.

1. The first of the three R's of life is "rhythm. All of life needs to be lived in rhythm. Do not be misled by the definition of rhythm that you will find in the dictionary. There's an element of mystery to the rhythm of life. It is the invisible wave on which life itself is carried.

From the beginning of time, human beings have been aware of a rhythm in all of creation. To be in rhythm is to be in the flow of life. It is to pace oneself, as a long distance runner paces himself or herself — not to# go too fast or too slow. To have rhythm in one's life is to know when to work and when to rest; when to sleep and when to awake; it is to have some order, some pattern, some flow, some sense in one's living.

Life itself has a rhythmical quality. There are seasons of the year, the motion of the planets and stars. The human body itself is an intricate complex of inter-relating rhythms; waking and sleeping, action and rest, feeding and evacuation. Scientific research is almost daily dis-covering some more subtle rhythmical manifestations in human beings, diurnal cycles in body temperature, regular sequences in dream-activity, electrical cycles in heart, lungs and liver, hormonal changes running parallel to changes in the seasons — these and many other human rhythms are now coming into view. Rhythms, in fact, insinuate themselves into every organ of the body and even into all of its cells. Some illness can be described as parts of our body and spirit being out of rhythm. — the body not functioning in harmony within itself. Our life is out of rhythm and vJe· get sick. 2.

Of all human rhythms, the most basic are the rhythms of breathing and of the beating heart. Heart muscle is per- h: remarkable kind of living tissue that exists. aps the most . Somewhere within the structure of each individual fiber, independent of any impulses arising from elsewhere, is contained a mysterious power to contract and relax in a self-generated rhythm.

Our Christian faith reminds us that all of life is to have a certain rhythm. The fourth commandment of the ten puts the need for rhythm in life in religious terms. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the 7th is the Sabbath to the Lord your God." Take time to be holy. Take time for rest. That's part of the rhythm of life. The saints in our his-tory worked out a daily rhythm of worship, work, prayer and relaxation.

Good human relationships have a certain rhythm to them. Sometimes we say we have good vibrations with another person, good rhythm. Good health is a reflection of being in harmony and in rhythm with oneself physically, psychologically and spiritually and of being in rhythm with others and with one's total environment. So our Christian faith reminds us — pay attention to the rhythm in life. It's one of the three R's.

2. The second of the three R's of living is — "relinquishment" or renunciation. It is the art of "letting go," when it's necessary to let go. Most of what we are taught in life is how to get things, how to make friends and influence people and how to hold onto things. Thus most of us are much better, more skillful in acquisition than we are at letting things go.

Yet in the arithmetic of life, in the rhythm of life if you please, both processes are at work. We win and we lose. We lose life, we lose work, we lose innocence, we lose power, we lose friends, and we lose many things, some good and some not so good. Some people work hard at losing weight and most of us know that it is easier to gain weight than lose it. All of life, however, is made up of gaining and losing.

So it is that one of the basic three R's of life is relinquishment, the art of letting go, renunciation. Jesus said that if one wants to find his or her life, we have to lose it, let it go, relinquish it.

Another part of relinquishment which our Christian faith teaches is accepting the fact that in the long run all things go away. So relinquishment is allowing, letting go, nonattachment. It means relaxing the grasping hand. It means being less possessive, sometimes allowing distance. Most of us are too possessive. If you are on the beach and try to see how much sand you can hold in your hand, the tighter you hold on, the less you have. If you keep your hand open, much more sand will remain in it. So it is with much of life, the tighter we try to hold on, the less we have. We need to let go.

Relinquishment, letting go, means also not giving eternal value to the things we own, the people we know, the plans we have and the successes or failures we collect. All things go away. Nothing is eternal except God. Nothing can finally satisfy us except God. That's why Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

There are so. many things we have difficulty relinquishing. We even have trouble letting go of our hates, our resentments, our fears, our anxieties, our worries, our troubles — we hang onto such things as if they are priceless treasures, things we couldn't do without. All the time I meet people who nurse their hatreds and their resentments and who wouldn't let them go for anything. They seem to enjoy them in a curious way. Some even enjoy their illnesses.

Have you ever noticed that some people collect grievances and hurts like others collect stamps or rocks. They go through life looking for people to hurt them and remembering every time they've been hurt for the past 20 years. They add new hurts to their collection and delight in telling others how bad off they are, how persecuted and unloved.

But our Christian faith says, learn the art of relinquishment, of letting go. This morning as you leave this place, leave your hurts and resentments and hates and grievances here. Let them go. Let go of your bad habits and those traits within yourself that you don't like. Why carry around such heavy weights! Let go your unhappiness, your worries, what good are they doing you. Jesus said, "do not be anxious about your life; which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."

Being able to let go means also being able to give freely and with no strings attached. Too much of our giving is with strings attached which means we really haven't let go of what we have given. We want to hang onto it and have some control over it.

Pay attention to the second R in life — relinquishment, letting go.

3. The third R of life is equally as important as the first two, in fact all three fit together and are related to each other. The third R is "reassessment." It means simply this — all through life we need to be reassessing our values, what we are working for, where we are going. Jesus said, "Choose this day whom you shall serve."

What are you serving? What is the most important thing to you in your life now? Look at it. Is it the right goal? Is it worth what you are giving to it? What is your real god? What do you bow down to and worship?

There has been a great deal of research and writing lately on how to relax, how to reduce stress and tension. But having a method for eliciting what Dr. Benson calls "the Relaxation Response, is not in itself sufficient for eliminating the health wreckers from your life. To do that you need something more; more than the right technique.

We have to reassess our lives so that we can see more clearly what things, habits, goals, to let go, relinquish This means examining our values and our character so that we know what shallow vain pursuits are governing our lives and that have led us to be uptight, disgruntled, despondent, belligerent or alone.

Has your life been spent seeking wealth, fame, glamour, power, social influence, status? Has your behavior been abusive, obstinate, domineering, boastful, proud? These are the sources of your discomfort and the world's misery. This is where the stress in your life may be coming from.

Overall health in body, mind and spirit exists when we are working for the right values, and when we are in harmony and rhythm with ourselves ·arid others. Illness appears most often when this process is disrupted and this disruption occurs most measurably in the presence of stress and conflict.

We now face the fact in our society that stress disorders have replaced the infectious diseases as the major health afflictions of our civilized world. Such diseases as cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory disorders, arthritis, ulcers, migraines, and such lesser ailments as allergies, dermatitus, impotence, headaches, backaches and colds.

Dr. David Bresler has an especially wonderful prescription for his chronic pain patients. In addition to relaxation exercises, he prescribes four hugs daily. Joy and pain are mutually incompatible, he says, and adds that he's found the hugs to be as effective as anything else.

When we reassess our lives so that we stop worrying, let go of the tension in our body by deliberately relaxing, the results are remarkable. All the body functions, blood pressure, respiration, immunological activity, to name just a few, relax and begin to work more efficiently. In this relaxed state, the body's self-regulatory processes work at their best to produce optimum health and the state of well-being.

It is no accident that society's models for the fully developed human being, include many saints and holy people. They have been revered for many reasons; their compassion, devotion, inspirational words of wisdom, service to the world. The trait that is of particular importance for us here is their equanimity, their tranquility, their ease of mind and peace of heart in the face of circumstances that for most others would be extremely stressful, if not overwhelming.

What has been their secret? ·Each of them has discovered the truth of the saying, "Let go and let God!" When a sense of the infinite or the transpersonal replaces our usual narrow self-centeredness, there is no longer a basis for fear, anger, or tension. Then we can say like St. Paul, "For I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty- and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

The three R's — Rhythm, Relinquishment and Reassessment, are basic to the Christian faith and to all of J_ife. Practice them in your life. Amen.