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“Bowls of Tears” The Rev. Kara Leslie (12/03/2023, The First Sunday of Advent)

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Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto you, O Lord, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

It has been a tearful week, Rosalyn Carter's funeral, seeing President Jimmy Carter rolled out, covered in a blanket with his wife's picture on it, the death of Henry Kissinger, and then on Friday we had Justice Sandra Day O'Connor die. We've also seen from both sides the Middle East crisis, the return of captives and the tears that have filled people's eyes and hearts, especially when the little children have been returned. And then in the next ten days here at St. Albans, we will lay to rest two of our older saints in services here. It has been an emotional week, one with many tears. Our psalmist today declares that God feeds us with bread of tears and bowls of tears. Maybe this is a bit exaggerated, but I know there have been times in my life, and maybe in your life when all that you can do is cry. I tell people when they're in grief, I'll tell them, yes, you're going to cry every day all day for a while. And then you'll get to where you cry every day, but not all day. And then you'll skip days of crying, and then you're going to be upset that you weren't crying, and you'll be a sobbing mess because you weren't crying. It is a vicious cycle in grief, but we know what it's like to eat and drink tears. Now much has changed in our lives since this psalm was written, but we're still able to make tears and plenty of them. Perhaps you knew that there are three different kinds of

tears and three different layers of tears. And why am I talking about tears when we're in the middle of Christmas? Well, sometimes this time of year, there are tears to be shed, and there are plenty of things in our world and in our news that remind us that there is a need for tears in crying. Now I'm going to digress here for a moment because perhaps you didn't know, but I will tell you this morning that you have two pools. Two pools. Now I'm not talking about a swimming pool. I'm talking about tear pools. If you have ever laid down and cried while you are laying down, your tears will gather in these little buckets right here in your ears. Now I think that is absolutely fascinating that we're made with ear pools. I know that seems, I told you I'd digress, but it is fascinating that we have those. Now if you have a hearing aid, you know what I'm talking about. If you lay down and you get water in the hearing aid, it doesn't always work, it gets crackly, let's just say. But we have these pools for our ears, for the tears that flow from our eyes when life is hard, when life is joyful, when we live life. We begin this season of Advent, four weeks before Christmas Eve, and I know Andrew is going to remind you, but I'm going to remind you first. We have four Sundays in Advent, today is one, and we'll have two, three, and four, and on the fourth one in the morning will be here, and in the evening it will be Christmas Eve. So you can come for the morning service at 10, and then we'll have Christmas Eve that evening. Advent is a time of waiting and preparing for the birth of Jesus, a time when we know God comes to be with us, to be like us, and to redeem us. Whether you read the story in Matthew or Luke, the birth of Christ, there are a lot of things that are happening to Mary and those around that maybe would make any of us cry. I mean, there's talking angels, there's old women having birth, there is men that are silent because the angel made them silent, there's holy visions, not to mention eight months pregnant on a donkey. I mean, all of that would make you cry. Mary is a young girl. She's left her family in her hometown to ride, to go to Bethlehem. You know the tears are coming down her face as she's looking back, wondering what is in front of her. Joseph too was probably very emotional and overwhelmed with

the responsibility of getting her there safely, of all the angel had told him that was going to happen. How was he going to do it? He was too emotional. Now realize on this journey toward Bethlehem there are no iPads, there are no iPhones to play games. There's no Deluxe Comfort seat with personal adjustments on the donkey and there's no express lane to get into so she can get there or they can get there quicker. It is a scary time full of long dusty roads and they journeyed toward Bethlehem with tears. Now maybe we're not moving toward Bethlehem personally but what if you're looking at divorce? You've been married 12 years, 10 years in therapy and you've just decided divorce might be the hardest thing but there really are no other options. Or maybe your child, your grown child is again being tempted with addictions. They're choosing unhealthy ways of handling their frustration and pain and they're becoming numb on the inside which you know really is it. Maybe your older parents are not talking about their health issues and they don't really want to talk to you about it but there's some physical challenges that are happening and you need to talk with them honestly about what their goals are and what their priorities are in their life and this last season of life. All of those can be tearful journeys that we all take in our lives and the proclamation that bread and drink are full of tears is not just suspended in our song. It's not just song 80 with that one verse. There are two there are one other verse that's repeated three times in these 18 verses and in your bulletin it is turn us again O God show us the light of Thy countenance and we shall be whole. Now that's the coverdale that's a fancy way of saying it but the way I would like to say it for us this morning is restore us O God of host show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved. Once before the tears twice after the tears this refrain is said because somewhere this song is new that even though tears are part of life there was more that we have a God that restores us that shows his countenance upon us and that comes to save us. These actions are what hold us and give us life and this time of the Christian year you have probably already been overwhelmed. I mean if you've been in traffic at all if you've tried to go online shopping if you've done anything with holiday you might have

experienced long lines maybe  
some overeating maybe some over drinking maybe everybody's getting  
invited to party and you're not  
maybe everybody else gets the bonus but you don't. There's all these  
expectations and overwhelming  
feelings that come with this holiday season whenever you are on a  
journey toward Bethlehem  
God knows and seeks you out to restore you to show you and to save  
you. Picture human beings here  
we're all a mess we're doing our thing and God says I need to come and  
restore these people  
they are lost sheep so God comes as Jesus Christ to be with us to  
restore us to show the light upon  
us and to save us. Not just to be with us but to deliver us from sin  
and pain and death and to  
go on and live life abundantly in his grace and love. It's like  
restore show and save or this  
infusion that come into our beings that give us life and enable us to  
face whatever challenges  
that we have in this world. I wish I could say that Advent isn't going  
to offer any tears  
but I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand if you've already shed  
it here but I understand  
that that is part of the season and as we go through these four weeks  
I want to invite you  
to welcome the tears to fill your ear pools to let your heart weep but  
to also know that it is not  
the last word that there is restoration that there is a shining light  
that there is salvation  
for every one of us. Tears are not our bread of life it is the body  
and blood of Jesus Christ.  
Let me share a story with you I have a dear friend who lives in  
Atlanta and we've been friends  
for a long time since I was in college a long time ago and she's  
delightful and so we were talking  
this last week and she told me about an experience that she had. It  
was Thanksgiving Day  
it was raining in Atlanta if you can imagine that and she was  
determined to get out of the house  
she lives alone didn't have any friends or family they've all gone  
before and she said I'm just  
going to get out and I'm going to go get a cup of coffee so she gets  
out in the rain and there's  
a Starbucks this way but she says something told me to turn left and  
so she turned left and she's  
sitting at the stop light right before she crosses the main road to go  
into the parking lot  
and she's weeping she's crying from loneliness crying from just the  
hardship of life  
and she asked God God is there any more kindness in this world any

more kindness and she is weeping  
at the wheel the light changes she goes across this road and she parks  
the car usually she does  
the drive-through I mean of course it's raining it's Thanksgiving Day  
why get out of your car  
she got out of her car of course you know she walked in there and if  
you've ever noticed  
somebody's been crying their eyes are red their skin is blotchy  
they're sniffing all the  
signs that something had just happened in the car so she goes up and  
she's second in line and the  
guy for her he's dressed like he was looking for warm place and he was  
trying to dry out and somehow  
he he was there he ordered his drink and he moved to the side and she  
went up there and she said  
I'll have such and such and how much is it and he said you don't have  
to pay the man before you  
paid and she looked at him and thought wow restore the light of Christ  
salvation this man reminded her  
that tears are not everything to our lives that we have a God that  
seeks us out to restore us  
to shine his countenance upon us and to save us  
Amen