**Easter Sunday Act of Worship**

**Opening Words**

**“He is not here, he has risen!”** (Luke 24:6)

Friends, welcome to our Easter Sunday Service of Celebration! As we remember, give thanks and celebrate the empty tomb - for Jesus **has risen**! Wherever we are watching this and at whatever time you are watching this you are welcome. You might be on your own, as I am here in church, or you may be with family by rest assured we are all gathered together united by the Holy Spirit as we rejoice on this Easter Day!

An opening prayer….

Father God,

we come to you

because you turn doubt into hope,

tears into laughter

and fear into fearlessness.

We come to you

because on Easter Sunday

and on every other day,

we can say, ‘Jesus is alive!’

Amen!!

(https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2020/106-march-april-2020-a/easter-day/gather)

*(Just before we sing our opening hymn this is a reminder that we will be sharing in Communion later in the service. In case you have not got your bread and wine (juice) ready…you can always pause the video and go and get it ready!)*

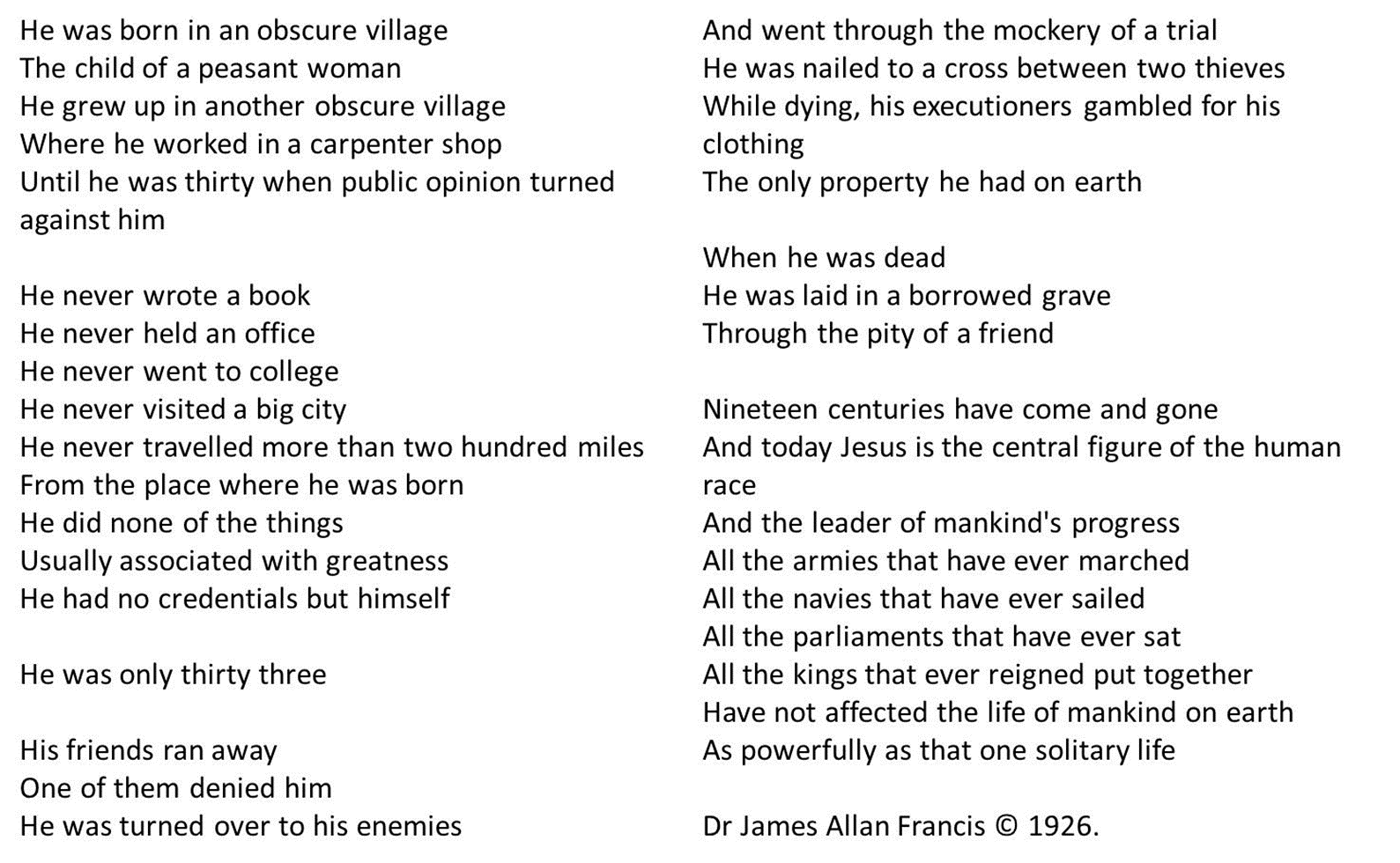
We sing our opening song of celebration…it might be new to some but familiar to others….we hear the first verse as instrumental and then join the singing will begin - **See what a morning.**

|  |  |
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| **See, what a morning**  1.. See, what a morning, gloriously bright,  with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;  folded the grave clothes, tomb filled with light,  as the angels announce, Christ is risen!  See God's salvation plan,  wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,  fulfilled in Christ, the man  for He lives: Christ is risen from the dead! | 3.. One with the Father, Ancient of Days,  through the Spirit, who clothes faith with certainty  honour and blessing, glory and praise  to the King crowned with power and authority!  And we are raised with Him,  death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered;  and we shall reign with Him,  for He lives: Christ is risen from the dead! |
| 2.. See Mary weeping, "Where is He laid?"  as in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;  hears a voice speaking, calling her name;  it's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!  The voice that spans the years,  speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us, will sound till He appears,  for He lives: Christ is risen from the dead! | Stuart Townend and Keith Getty  ©2003 Thankyou Music/Capitol CMG Publishing/Integritymusic.com  ccli 275793 |

**Reading: ‘A solitary life’**

A few nights ago I was watching a YouTube video of one of my favourite worship leaders and as part of his time of worship filmed in his house he read the following poem, called “A solitary life”

As I heard the words it got me thinking about Easter Sunday and what, or more accurately, who we celebrate on this day. Not just any man…but God’s Son.



Let us pray….

**Prayers of praise and thanksgiving**

Loving God, we come on this day to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the light of Jesus and we thank you that the tomb on that first Easter Sunday was empty, for Jesus had risen from the dead by the power of Your hand.

Today we come in celebration and thanksgiving for the miracle of resurrection, that was not some accident but in your divine plan and purpose. We come today rejoicing that Jesus is risen and that through the cross we, too, can experience the joy of resurrection when we place our trust and lives into your loving and gracious hands.

As we gather today in this time of isolation and as we later share in the bread and wine of communion we may come with thankful hearts for all that you have done, are dong and will do. Help us to come with hearts that are open to Your Word of resurrection in our lives today.

We come to seek the light of Jesus today on this day of resurrection power!

Amen.

We sing another Easter hymn – Christ the Lord is risen today!

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Christ the Lord is risen today**  1.. Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!  sons of men and angels say: Alleluia!  raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!  sing, ye heavens thou earth reply: Alleluia! | 4.. Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!  where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!  Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!  where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia! |
| 2.. Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!  fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!  Lo! our sun's eclipse is o'er, Alleluia!  Lo! He sets in blood no more, Alleluia! | 5.. Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!  following our exalted Head, Alleluia!  made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!  ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia! |
| 3.. Vain the stone, the watch, the seal, Alleluia!  Christ hath burst the gates of hell, Alleluia!  death in vain forbids Him rise, Alleluia!  Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia! | 6.. Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia!  praise to Thee by both be given, Alleluia!  Thee we great, in triumph sing, Alleluia!  Hail, our resurrected King, Alleluia! |
| Charles Wesley ccli 275793 | |

We say a line together at the end of each of the three verses of prayer…the words when we need to say them will appear on then screen.

**Prayers of confession** (parts in bold type to be said aloud by us all)

When we have failed to recognise you as our Saviour,  
when we have failed to acknowledge you as our risen Lord,  
when we have doubted that you are with us:  
**forgive us, and fill our hearts with joy**.

When we have not shared your good news,  
when we have been too concerned with ourselves,  
when we have not shared the joy of knowing you with others:  
**forgive us, and fill our hearts with joy**.

When we have failed to bring hope to the hopeless,  
when we have failed to bring joy to the joyless,  
when we have failed to offer your grace to those who hurt us:  
**forgive us, and fill our hearts with joy.**  
**Amen**.

(<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2020/106-march-april-2020-a/easter-day/prayers>)

And we say together the prayer that not only unites us as church but unites us with sisters and brothers across the centuries and across the world – The Lord’s Prayer:   
Our Father who art in heaven…

**Bible Reading: Matthew 28:1-10- Jesus has risen**

1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: “He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.” Now I have told you.’

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’

Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Sermon:**

*A question on this Easter Sunday Morning: What is the best ‘good news’ you have ever received? Perhaps:*

*\*You’ve got the job? \* A “yes” to the question – ‘Will you marry me?’ \*You’re pregnant  
\*You’re cancer free! \*You’ve passed your exams!*

All the above would qualify as being “good news.” Today is a day of good news!

In the Matthew reading we heard a few moments ago we heard of two Marys getting up early and going to the tomb. Was it that they couldn’t sleep because of all that had happened or was it the earthquake that woke them up or was it another reason? Whatever the reason they set out early to head for the tomb where they had seen Jesus’ body laid down.

The earthquake, we are told, was the angel coming from heaven, he rolled the stone away and sat on it! Some might suggest he came like some superhero and with awesome strength rolled the stone away! But he came with the power of heaven, God’s messenger, God’s mouthpiece to act on God’s behalf. The guards froze with fear!!!

I want us to thinking about this passages under three different headings today:-

**1: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.” (Matthew 28:5)**

Fear can cause paralysis! We heard it in regard to the guards as they froze like **“dead men.”**

*What are you fearful of? I am fearful of heights and confined spaces! You’d never get me on a huge roller coaster or caving!* In all honesty I am not sure how I would have reacted to the angel appearing and suddenly moving a huge stone and then sitting on it!

Emotions must have been running high in these women as they went to the tomb. Perhaps they were anxious and would feel some comfort being near the place where they’d expect Jesus body to be. Instead of seeing the stone covering the entrance to the tomb they saw it rolled away and the body of Jesus gone!!

The angel spoke directly to the women. The angel represented God. The appearance described in Matthew’s Gospel was one of a heavenly being, God’s representative and at this moment God’s messenger to speak to these two women.

*In these times of anxiety and fear in which we currently live – to the point that even HRH The Queen gave an address to the nation – may we trust in God. May we pray to God. May we hear God’s voice speaking to us in our times of prayer. May we lift each other to God in prayer. May we heed the words of the angel…* ***“do not be afraid.”***

The second point I want to highlight is what the angel went on to say….

**2. “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”   
(Matthew 28:5b)**

After words of comfort: “do not fear” the angel says to the women “He is not here; he has risen…come and see.” In other words, don’t look for the living in a place where you expect to find the dead.   
The opening of the tomb was not to allow Jesus to come out! By the time the stone was rolled Jesus had risen! The rolled away stone was for the benefit of the women to show that Jesus had fulfilled what he said would happen.

Nothing on earth could have kept Jesus in that tomb! The angel didn’t just say that Jesus had risen and that they should go on their way – he invited the women to see with their own eyes that the body of Jesus was no longer in the tomb. The tomb no longer needed for him! Because he was alive.

They had seen Jesus die on the cross. They had seen his body placed in the tomb and now they were being shown the empty tomb.

*This was not some trick played on these two women. Time was of the essence. The Angel wanted them to know, believe and accept that Jesus’ body hadn’t been stolen….or moved by the authorities. He was alive and with His people! As he was then he is now in the lives of His believers.*

*And the angel have further instructions…*

**3. “Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”** (Matthew 28:7)

This was a general not specific “go and tell”. They were to go and share the joy of the resurrection. They were to spread the news that Jesus who had, three days earlier, been beaten and killed, was now alive and with His people.

Just as he is today. Alive within the hearts of his followers. Jesus went ahead of the disciples to Galilee; he didn’t wait and walk with them. They were to “follow” but they could only follow once they had been told! The women played, as they did so much in the Easter narrative, an important role. They were the spokeswomen for God. As they left the empty tomb (we presume with no doubts at all) the first person they meet is the risen Jesus.

He confirms what the angel of God had told them…he was going to Galilee and there he would meeting his disciples.

*And that is, in many ways, the mission statement for the Church today.*

*\*We are not to fear about anything that is happening/will happen in the world (I admit it is often easier said than done!)*

*\*We are to allow God to speak to us, to show us and to lead us on (as the angel did with these two women) and we are to follow as the disciples would follow Jesus who had gone ahead of them.*

*\*We are to “Go and tell” others the good news of the resurrected Jesus. That is our mission. And there’s no option whether to accept it or not…we are to accept when we become followers of Jesus.*

*But it is not a blind faith…the disciples were to meet Jesus in Galilee and he would give guidance and instructions to them.*

May we like these two Marys have the faith and trust to listen…to act…and to follow. So that we might meet with, and be empowered by, the risen Jesus.

Let us pray….

Loving God give us the faith of these two women. Faith to listen, to trust, to act and to follow so that your plan and purpose would be known to us as Your followers and Your Church today.   
Full us with Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our next hymn is a favourite of two children at Bamford Chapel and Norden URC and it fits within the theme of celebration today.

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| **Lord, the light of your love is shining**  1.. Lord, the light of your love is shining,  in the midst of the darkness, shining:  Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us;  set us free by the truth You now bring us -  shine on me, shine on me. | 3.. As we gaze on Your kingly brightness  so our faces display Your likeness,  ever changing from glory to glory:  mirrored here may our lives tell Your story -  shine on me, shine on me. |
| 2.. Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,  from the shadows into Your radiance;  by Your blood I may enter Your brightness:  search me, try me, consume all my darkness -  shine on me, shine on me. | *Shine, Jesus, shine,*  *fill this land with the Father's glory;*  *blaze, Spirit blaze,*  *set our hearts on fire.*  *Flow, river, flow*  *flood the nations with grace and mercy;*  *send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light!* |
| Graham Kendrick © 1987 May Way Music ccli 275793 | |

**Communion (abridged introduction provided by Revd Dr John Bradbury the General Secretary elect of the URC):**

“In this time of coronavirus, physical distancing and lockdown, any celebration of Holy Communion is damaged. Across the family of the church, we cannot today share fully together the one loaf and the one cup. That we cannot do, and we lament.

But in communion we follow the command of Christ to remember him. That we can do. We come to remember with thanksgiving Christ’s death upon the cross and his resurrection. That we can do. We pray that the Holy Spirit will unite us with Christ, and across space and time with one another. That we can do, gathered or scattered as community.

You may wish to take bread and wine at home, and join me in saying some of the communion prayers. You might, perhaps, prefer to use these prayers later at your Easter meal table, so that as you gather at table, you remember all Christ has done for us, and pray that he will be present with you at table through the work of the Holy Spirit. If so, you may wish to leave out the words in brackets whilst using these prayers as a form of extended ‘grace’ at the table. However you find it most helpful to join with us, our prayer is that our celebration of Holy Communion may reach out to everyone sharing with us in some way, such that God will unite us with one another, and with Christ, that we might be fed by the Holy Spirit in these difficult days.”

The service liturgy I am using, and adapted in places, is from the URC Service Book’s “Second Order of Holy Communion – especially when all ages are present. The words in bold type are words congregations would usually read out and I invite you to do so.

The Invitation

Jesus was often a guest. He shared many meals with his friends, and they long remembered his words at the table.

Though some disapproved of the company he kept, Jesus ate and drank with all kinds of people and showed everyone the love of God.

Wherever people met together Jesus was glad to be welcomed and to be fed. Today, we are the guests of Jesus. He welcomes us, whoever we are and whatever we bring, and he will feed us at this table. Old or young, rich or poor, joyful or in sorrow. Jesus invites us to share bread and wine with him, to remember the story of his life and death, and to celebrate his presence with us today.   
On the night before he died, Jesus shared a meal with twelve of his disciples in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. The Gospel writer tells us what happened that night: (below is a cut to a video)

“22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this my body’. 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, 24 ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I tell you, I will never again drink the fruit of the vine until I drink it new in the Kingdom of God.’”  
(Mark 14:22-25)

We bring this bread a symbol of the bread which we have in our homes. Along with this bread we bring ourselves and all that we are and all that we have. May the ordinary become holy, and heaven be opened to the people of earth. (parts in red need to appear on the screen)

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

God is with us!

**God is with us!**

We give thanks and praise to God!

**We give thanks and praise to God!**

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder. You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made. You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people thought the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace. He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.   
he healed in pain and brought back to life those who had lost hope. He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies. For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died. And he was raised from death as we remember today on this Easter Day and lives never again to die.

You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us, to remind us of Jesus Christ, and to make us one in him.

For all these gifts we thank you, and we join with all your people on earth and in heaven in joyful praise:

Hosanna!

**Hosanna!**

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

Hosanna in the highest!

**Hosanna in the highest!**

(Mark 11:9b,10b)

We praise you that we gather at the table of Jesus in our homes. We have heard the Good News of your love: the cross is the sign of your arms stretched out in love for us and the empty tomb declares your love stronger than death.

Christ has died!

**Christ has died!**

Christ is risen!

**Christ is risen!**

Christ will come again!

**Christ will come again!**

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine (juice) and upon your people scattered in community, that Christ may be with us, and we may be made ready to live for you and to do what you ask of us, today, and every day to come.

We make this prayer through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the love of the Father, one God to whom be glory and praise forever. **Amen.**

The Sharing of bread and wine

*(direction: feel free to lift your bread and the cup or simply say/reflect on these words)*

As we heard in the Bible reading from Mark: Jesus took bread *(lift the bread if you want)* and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, “take this is my body” we take and eat the bread a symbol of the Body of Christ. *(if on your own break a piece of bread or take a piece of bread and eat. If with others then please serve or share the bread between each other and then eat)*

*[take a moment of quiet reflection]*

As we also heard in the Bible reading from Mark: Jesus took the cup *(lift the cup if you want)* and when he had given thanks he gave it to his disciples saying, “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many…” we take the cup of wine and drink a symbol of the blood of Christ *(if on your own drink from the cup. If you are with others pass the cup(s) around so all can drink).*

*[take a moment of quiet reflection]*

We pray together:

**Loving God, thank you for giving your Son Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the world.   
On this Easter Day we give thanks that we can have life because He gave His life for us.**

**We have celebrated in this act of remembrance the life and death of our Saviour, Jesus. In whose name we pray Amen.**

We continue in a time of prayer. Interspersed in these prayers will be the instrumental of “Be still for the presence of the Lord” I invite you to sit and reflect during the instrumental music:

**Prayers for others (words in green will need to be recorded on audio)**

Gracious and loving God, we come before you on this day of celebrating resurrection. A day of great joy and raise as we worship you. But we come knowing that there are places in your world where your touch is needed. Places where people are suffering because of war, hunger, thirst, sickness and human trafficking. We pray that we would all play our part in being an answer to our prayers.

We pray that they may know the presence of the resurrected Jesus on this Easter Day.

*(Be still for the presence of the Lord is played)*

We pray for those who are suffering because of Coronavirus. For those who are sick and in hospital. For those who are sick and at home. We pray for your healing hand to come upon them.   
We lift to you those who are grieving because of the loss of a loved one to the Virus.

We pray that they may know the comforting arms of the resurrected Jesus.

We pray for those who grieve the loss of loved ones who have died of others illnesses or age.

We pray for those who are in hospital with conditions other than Coronavirus.

We pray that they may know the comforting arms of the resurrected Jesus.

*(Be still for the presence of the Lord is played)*

We pray for your Church scattered in community at this time. We pray that your people would continue to radiate the light of Jesus in the families and communities in which we are set.

Until your Church gathers again, Lord, may we never tire in prayer, worship and in the care of one another. May we all know the comforting arms of the resurrected Jesus.

*(Be still for the presence of the Lord is played)*

We pray for ourselves and our families. We pray for those who are isolating on their own. For those who experience the darkness of loneliness and isolation. May they know the love, care, thoughts and prayers of the Church. We pray for those members of our own family who we are unable to see and meet. We pray for members of our family for whom we are concerned, because of being in hospital and those who live in other countries.

May we and they know the presence of the resurrected Jesus. In whose name we offer our prayers.

**Amen.**

We sing a final hymn….it is a new one to me but chosen by our musicians today. All shall be well!

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| **All shall be well**  1.. All shall be well!  For on our Easter skies  see Christ the sun of righteousness arise. | 4.. All shall be well!  Within our Father's plan  death has no more dominion over man. |
| 2.. All shall be well!  The sacrifice is made;  the sinner freed,  the price of pardon paid. | 5.. Jesus alive! Rejoice and sing again,  'All shall be well for evermore, Amen!' |
| 3.. All shall be well!  The cross and passion past;  dark night is done,  bright morning come at last. | Timothy Dudley-Smith  Oxford University Press  ccli 275793 |

**Prayer of Blessing for the week ahead:**

God of light and God of resurrection. Be with us today and in the week that lies ahead.   
May we know the presence of God in the love of the Father, the presence of the Son and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen!**