For many of us, the last time we were together in this sacred space was either Good Friday or Palm Sunday, both liturgies giving us the opportunity to hear the story of the passion of Jesus. The elements of that story, as popularly perceived, do not offer much reason to hope. The garden agony, the bloody sweat, the sleeping friends, the torch-carrying crowd, the kiss, the slash of the sword, the questioning, the scourging, the mocking, the carrying of the cross, the pounding of the nails, the cry of despair on the lips of a good man-- all of these reflect much of what is so often wrong with the world, even as we experience it today.

Nearly every human institution comes off poorly here. The government gives Jesus the bureaucratic shuffle, with no one wanting to take responsibility, until a weak leader gives in to the crowd in the name of keeping the peace. Professional men of religion are violently sectarian and judgmental, and turn to the state to enforce their beliefs. The local community turns hostile and cruel toward Jesus, first putting palms beneath his feet, and then thorns upon his head. The friends of Jesus are sleeping while his enemies are fully awake. There is a betrayal by a close, disgruntled associate... and then Peter's cowardly denials. And for a moment, even God seems to fail, vanishing into shocking silence. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" says Jesus.

At the end of the passion of Jesus, government, institutional religion, the community, and friendship have all been discredited. And God himself seems absent or unmoved. Every ember of human hope was cold.

But then something happened... something happened... and that is why we are here tonight(day)!

We could ask all sorts of questions when hearing the gospel stories of the resurrection. How did it actually happen? What did the women see and feel and experience? What did the risen Lord look like? But those details are not important for our celebration tonight(day). The constant profession of faith in the creed over centuries has simply stated that Jesus died for our sins, and was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. He is alive and living in us and through us
as members of the Body of Christ. That is the Body of Christ that Josh Ewin chose to become a member of through the Initiation Sacraments last night.

And so when reflecting on the reality of the resurrection of Christ, rather than focusing on the question "What happened back then?" it is more important for each of us to answer the question "What is happening now because Christ is alive, and risen in glory, our Lord and Savior?"

Because God brought, from the lifeless tomb, the risen Lord, who is among us today by his spirit, how are we to live? What does it mean for us individually to be raised with Christ, to be made alive by faith in the risen One... and for us communally to be God's people of resurrection life and hope?

For many, this week may have been an experience of darkness. During this week, someone received terrible news from their physician; during this week, someone suddenly lost their job; during this week, someone heard the words “I don’t love you anymore”; during this week, someone’s biggest hope for their life was crucified. We see in the news every day how many people around the world are experiencing the passion of Christ. Millions know the darkness of poverty and economic injustice; the darkness of war and terrorism. Violence plagues the lives of others; the darkness of oppression and injustice is a lived reality for too many; and people still experience the darkness of prejudice and hatred.

But into that darkness has come the light of the risen Christ to bring us hope. Tonight (At the Easter Vigil last night), we followed a single flame atop the Easter candle into this building, and that light spread to all who were present, signaling the hope that was also spreading. We know through faith that we have found the true light to lead us-- no other light can suffice. Through his baptism to last night, Josh affirms that Christ is the light he has chosen for his life. And the gatherings of Christians all over the world for these Easter celebrations affirm our firm desire that the light of Christ shine through our lives into a world so often touched by darkness.

Josh will be welcomed as a full member of the church community through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Benedictine Father Godfrey Diekman, when reflecting on the Eucharist, once posed this provocative question: "What difference does it make if the bread and wine turns into the Body and Blood of Christ... and we don't?" That's the
challenge of the Eucharist and all the sacraments: to become what we receive. To become the light of God that is ignited within us at Baptism; to become for others the means of reconciliation as we are reconciled with God in that sacrament; and to become the Body of Christ that we will receive tonight(day) at the table of the Lord.

On Holy Thursday, we read the story of the Last Supper from John's gospel. Clearly, Peter, Judas, and the others in the company of Jesus don't understand the deeper meaning of what that supper meant. The disciples are often portrayed as misunderstanding the teaching of Jesus, and just not completely getting it. But transformation came to this small band of disciples, slowly and painfully, until they were changed into a community of the Resurrection, on fire with the love and hope of Christ.

In our world today, there is so much darkness, and we could be left in despair....

In our own lives today, many things often fail, and we could be left in despair...

In the passion story of Christ, even God seems to have gone missing, and we could be left in despair... but something happened.

That "something" is what we celebrate tonight (this morning), and what we are invited to welcome into our lives, and bring into our world so that we may live in hope. Like the disciples, we, too, can be transformed, slowly and painfully, into a community of the Resurrection, on fire with the love and hope of Christ... and that is why we have assembled here tonight(day).

Happy Easter!