

## Action Plan 2

Luke 4: 14-22

We live in a world of sequels. Sometimes, a movie or book is so successful that they make another one on the same theme to capitalize. Examples include *Mission Impossible 2* and now 3 and, a few years ago, the *Rocky* series. Sometimes, a story needs more than one movie or book to tell. Examples of this are *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Today's teaching is of this second kind. It's called Action Plan Two, is the second part of Action Plan 1 from two weeks ago. Inevitably some people only tune in for part two and they need scenes from part one to catch them up.

*Action Plan One* started with a question asked as part of the *Ask Jack* sermon series. It was proposed by a member of the congregation. "What is the appropriate response from the church to our country's current wars, torture, etc.?"

The question came with a scripture passage, Luke 4: 14-22. It is the story of Jesus coming home to Nazareth and teaching in the synagogue there. He read a passage from the scroll of Isaiah:

God's Spirit is on me;  
God's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,  
sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set the burdened and battered free,  
to announce, 'This is God's year to act!' (*The Message*)

Then Jesus impressed everybody by saying, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Jesus took this text from Isaiah as his own mission statement. He chose the meaning of his life and ministry in terms of Isaiah's words: sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed. He declared them to come true in his life. This is not a special, only for Jesus. It was not limited to him because of the way Christians have come to see a sense of divinity present in his life.

Isaiah's words also apply to us, as do Jesus' teachings. We are challenged to follow Jesus' example and to discover the Spirit of Jesus living in us. This message challenges each of us -- all of us.

This challenge for us is this: how will you and I respond to Isaiah's words and Jesus' example? Your homework assignment from part one was to consider the possibilities for your life in terms of these words. How could they come true and be fulfilled in you? Specifically, what will it mean to respond with integrity to these words and to Jesus' example in terms of our nation's current wars and the torture that clearly is taking place? We'll come back to the homework a little later

That catches everybody up. Now for *Action Plan 2*. We begin with a question: "how do Isaiah's words speak to you?" Where are you poor, blind, or burdened and battered? What are you not getting in life that is leaving you impoverished? What are you not seeing in life that is leaving you blinded? Where are you burdened and battered, feeling chained or imprisoned?

I ask myself the same question: how are Isaiah's words and Jesus' example speaking to me? My sense of being poor, blind, burdened, and battered is changing. What I am beginning to see is not new, but is new in clarity and implication for me.

What I have not been seeing clearly is that we have a crisis of violence in our world and our society. Religious and cultural intolerance is growing. I'm realizing what a big thing that is!

It seems the option of violence is being preferred. Violence and dominance have long been present in families and homes. Domestic violence is now more visible though it has been present for centuries. Perhaps as long as people have lived, wives and children have been severely beaten. Women and minorities have been dominated in societies.

How long did it take after the U. S. Constitution was adopted before slavery was abolished? How long was it before women got the legal right to vote? How long was it before descendants of former slaves were able to vote in any practical way? None of us did those things yet, even if we have lived passively within a culture that practiced them, this is the context of the culture in which we live. We can see the symptoms of this around of today: increasing poverty, blindness, burdens, and battering.

Since WW2, our society has been dominated by a military-industrial complex – the marriage of powerful military leadership with industry whose livelihood is based on making and selling increasingly effective and efficient weapons for killing people. I find myself just now beginning to see the full extent of this marriage that has driven my country's policies for the last fifty years and drives it today.

We're seeing the rise to power and influence of religious extremism in the world's major religious tradition – the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. In the Middle East, we're seeing the emergence of Islamic and Jewish extremism with access to political power on world stage. In the United States, we're seeing the emergence of Christian Protestant extremism with access to political power that is leading US policy toward domination and reliance on the propagation of violence. Our society is showing an increased willingness to blur the separation of church and state, to accept violence in the form of the loss of civil rights for cultural minorities, to tolerate the torture of prisoners in Guantanamo and other similar places, and a loss of passion for human rights as fundamental.

In Roman Catholicism and American Protestantism, there is a movement away from the reconciling philosophies of Vatican 2 and interfaith tolerance, and a return to a theology of domination. Theological certitude and rigidity has become widespread in the halls of power and influence.

It is important to look at our own blindness and poverty. Though difficult, we need to know what's going on. At the same time, it's easy to get stuck in the mire of everything that's wrong with ourselves and the world. Let's shift gears now and look at that homework assignment.

It was an assignment of imagination. We tend to see what we look for and we tend to look for what we've always seen in the past. Whatever our vision has been in the past, Isaiah's words, Jesus' life, and this worship service today are times of new beginning for us – of new possibility.

What are you seeing now? Yesterday, as I was working at home, the movie *Hook* came on television. The little bit that I saw was the part when Peter Pan, now a middle aged adult, is needing to rediscover his youthful power and magic in order to save his children from Captain Hook. Things were not going well with the Lost Boys. Finally, over dinner, Peter's imagination began to kick in and the empty dishes and pots became filled with colorful and delicious food. One of the boys looked at him and said, "Peter, you're imagining!"

In response to Isaiah's words,  
the Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
God has called me to bring good news to the poor.  
... to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

what are you imagining for yourself today? What are you imagining for your life? Where are freedom and potential beginning to bubble up at the corners of your mind or the shadows of your heart? What have you imagined over the past two weeks? What did you imagine in the spiritual exercise time this morning?

The responsibility to act belongs to each one of us. We can't wait for our church or family or our political party to act for us. How might you put one or more of your possibilities into action? What road blocks can you foresee? How might you deal with those roadblocks? Revise your action plan accordingly, then commit to that action plan.

Find a partner or a small group that support you and will hold you accountable. Learn not to be afraid of your possibilities and your potential. You might actually succeed in your goal. Positive action is important.

The possibility I see for me is to teach and inspire others to believe in themselves and their partnership with God, to believe in their possibilities to do big things with their lives. In realizing their possibilities, they will bring good news, sight, and freedom to the world. My work will help the Christian Church gain a clearer vision and a sense of a big picture to empower people and meet the challenges of following Jesus' example. If enough people live this way of possibility, this will remove the motivations for war and the fear that leads to torture.

In the meantime, I am declaring in a clear voice that war and torture are absolutely inconsistent with the message of Jesus and the mission of the Christian Church. They are clear signs that we have failed as a society in our quest to bring justice and freedom to other people, and that we are in danger of losing them ourselves.

Commit to your Action Plan. Ask yourself, "Does my possibility really excite me? Admit to yourself that your direction may change over the months and years to come. Let some person or small group support you in your plan and hold you accountable for moving forward. Believe that putting your plan into action will involve some risk. You will have to "color outside the lines" at least some of the time.

Confess that you have fear, anxiety, and resistance, then commit yourself to persevere anyway. Embrace the possibility that your life's direction, from today on, flows from the partnership of you and God; that God has given you the resources you need already, and that you are now in the process of discovering how gifted you are.

Be encouraged again by words of a song. It reflects the startling vision of a blind composer, Ken Medema:

*Start something. God's calling.  
Now I'm rising to the task, now I'm falling.  
Now I'm certain, now I wonder.  
Now I'm walking on the water, now I'm going under.  
The truth is I'm not ready. The truth is I'm too young.  
Sometimes the ones who are not ready  
Are the ones who get it done.  
Start something  
God's calling you and me to be what we were born to be;  
Calling you and me to be what we were born to be.*