

What Do *You* Make of Jesus?
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From 1970 until 1974 *The Flip Wilson Show* remained one of the most popular shows on television, holding the number 2 spot in the Nielsen Ratings during its first two seasons. Wilson was the first African American to host and star in an hour-long variety show. Wilson's hilarious character, Geraldine Jones, was an edgy, pugnacious lady with a past. She grew up in the Hood. Geraldine could spin out one-liners with the best, but her most memorable one was "The Devil made me do it!" She gave the Devil full credit for her outrageous behavior, batting her eyes in maidenly innocence tempered by a smirk. The legendary May West could not have done any better.

"Make/made" is a loaded verb no matter what the tense. Growing up, we tend to understand "make" as the sledgehammer of authority. Our parents, teachers, and others who have clout "make us" clean up our rooms, sit up straight, stop chewing with an open mouth, cease the surly backtalk, behave in the classroom, feed, walk, and clean up after the pets we pleaded for, and all the other trials we face growing up. Failure to do so brought punishments, loss of privileges, detentions, and the like. Don't even think Geraldine's "The Devil made me do it!" could excuse our own lapses and excesses. Perhaps that's why Wilson's Geraldine was so dearly loved; she got away with murder.

Growing up with others in authority bent on "making us" do all the appropriate things which make living in relationship possible can cause us to begrudge, even resent such intervention. Since this is often our default mode of living while growing up, we easily transfer the suspicion and irritation caused by authority onto God, Jesus, and the life of faith. We're entering a long period as Christians focusing on repentance. Jesus has already taken up John's own cry to repent in the readings we hear. Lenten disciplines [the spiritual version of New Year's resolutions] are just around the corner. The happy memory of the Baby Jesus is sadly compromised by Herod's treachery, John's imprisonment, and the Baptizer's eventual death. Jesus explains that his mission inevitably will take him to Jerusalem, prompting difficult encounters with the religious establishment, abandonment by formerly enthusiastic followers, and finally, betrayal and crucifixion. In our better moments we can understand as people of faith that we *must* consider the profound cost of Jesus' love for us; it is staggering. Thus, Lent may well strike us as a doozy of a downer, a time when we're made to behave, made to repent, made to deny ourselves, all because it is "good" for us in the long run. Sin, our mortality, and the devil who "made us do it" confront us, but unlike Geraldine, we are held accountable. However, we also need to consider "make/made" more fully. It does not solely mean "...being forced to do something, good or bad." How quickly we forget our weekly profession of faith's foundations: "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, **maker** of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen..."

"To make" has its roots in early Latin, Greek, and Indo-European languages, suggesting it originally had much to do with fashioning, building, creating, even kneading and mixing things like bread dough – the staff of life itself. The creation accounts in Genesis describe God "making" or "fashioning out of red clay" a couple to dwell in Eden. Jesus, son of that same Creator, is "begotten, not made..." but continues "making" life blessed by spitting in dust and making healing paste for the blind, making water into wine through blessing, healing, forgiving, saving, and fashioning the bread of

life and cup of salvation while at table with his disciples and others. Official liturgical verbs for the sacraments include both “consecrating” and “confecting” (like a chef).

Sunday we will hear about the continuation of Jesus’ early ministry. He hears of John’s imprisonment and takes up the forerunner’s cry to repent, that is, to “change our perspective” (what *repentance* / *metanoia* really means!) because the goodness of God’s kingdom is all around us. Like his Father, Jesus wants to “make” something of us, too, not by force but out of profound love. Jesus invites his disciples, his followers, including you and me, to join him in God’s gracious invitation into eternal life by “making” us fishers for people. Matthew’s gospel employs a familiar image for folks living by the sea. They know what it means to fish because it is a life-sustaining activity for them and any whose livelihood depends upon the waters of this earth.

So, the question is posed for us: what do *you* make of whatever activity it takes to keep your “soul and body” together, healthy, thriving, and honorable? You may not know anything about fishing or birthing babies, but you do know what you must do for yourselves, your families, and friends to sustain them and care for them in this life. That is how God connects to you in your own ministry and life of faith. By the things, actions, and insights your minds, hearts, and spiritual gifts afford you for a life marked by love, generosity, and compassion, God fashions an invitation for each of us. During these coming weeks we will discover that we do have the ears, eyes, minds, and hearts to hear God’s invitation. What will YOU make of what Jesus has MADE of you?