

2 ❖ I just did what Jesus said

Badibanga appeared one day at the new mission post, Ndjoko Punda. Like other boys of the area, he was attracted by the news that he could enroll in a school started by the white-skinned people and learn *maleta ne manomba*, letters and numbers.

Badibanga quickly proved himself an apt student with a hunger to learn. Although his home village was several kilometers from the mission post, he was always at school on time, soaking up how to spell out words with strange marks on a blackboard and, with equally strange marks, add up sums without counting fingers even once.

Badibanga listened just as attentively when he began to hear the story of Jesus. In time he decided to invite Christ into his heart and life, and when he did so, it was with a total commitment to this new relationship. He became a *mwena Yesu*, a Jesus person.

One Sunday morning during his last year of school he joined a group of other students as they made their way down the hill to the Kasai River and gave public witness to their faith by baptism. In the custom of the African church, in the process he adopted a new name, Valentin.

As graduation time neared, Valentin one day explained to the missionary director his great desire to seek training as a clerk. Anyone who could type, keep books, and oversee the filing of letters and documents could find immediate employment either in government offices or with Portuguese commercial men of the area. If he could do that, he'd be able to help his large family back in his home village and

also have money to give to his church. No such training was available at Ndjoko Punda, but another mission post far downstream offered it. His grades were good; would the missionary write on his behalf and seek an opening in their school? The director agreed. One day the riverboat brought a mail sack containing a letter of acceptance.

Carefully guarding his acceptance letter, Valentin boarded a riverboat that September, and after nearly two days of travel he disembarked down the hill from the Baptist mission post. He was shown to the boys dorm and given a bed. He unrolled his blanket and put his little bundle of belongings underneath.

The other boys in the dorm soon discovered they had a stranger among them, and Valentin became the object of harassment. "Where are you from? Why are you here? You don't even speak our language! We don't want you here. Go back where you came from!"

And so it went, day in and day out. But Valentin Badibanga did not retaliate in anger. He simply kept his peace and tried to stay out of the way of his tormenters.

One day he came to the dorm from class to find that his bed had been thrown out into the yard, upside down. His blanket lay beside it on the ground, all stained with ink. Valentin did not shout; he did not go to the school principal to complain. He simply gathered his things and pulled his bamboo cot back into the dorm to the far end where he had been isolated. He had come to study to be a clerk, and this was what he determined to do, no matter what.

A few days later the school principal called a meeting of all of the boys in the school. He explained that a woman from a far-off village had been carried into the station hospital the night before because she needed help to give birth to her baby. The doctor helped her, but she had lost so much blood before she arrived that unless she had a transfusion she would die. The missionary explained that they had already tested the blood of all of the medical staff and the missionaries, but no one had the same type as the village woman who was dying. He asked if any students would be willing to have their blood type tested. And in the event that someone had the right type, would he be willing to give some of his blood to save the life of the village woman?

There was a long silence. All sorts of thoughts were going through the minds of the boys. "Give my blood? For someone I don't even know? If I give my blood, won't I get sick or maybe even die?"

Still the missionary waited. Suddenly there was a voice at the back of the room, the voice of Valentin. "I'm willing," he said.

Shamed by this example of compassion by someone not of their tribe, slowly others said they too would be willing to be tested.

As it turned out, Valentin did not have the right blood type, but a donor was found among other volunteers. The woman was given the transfusion she desperately needed, her life was saved, and in a few weeks she returned to her home village with a healthy baby.

When the first year of study came to a close, the principal handed Valentin a letter to take to the Mennonite missionaries at Ndjoko Punda. Valentin stopped by the missionary's home and reported that his first year of study had gone well. "I'm learning exactly what I want to know. With another year, I'll have my certificate and I'll be able to look for a job."

Valentin dropped off the letter and hurried off to his home village. The missionary opened the letter and learned what Valentin had done for the woman in need. At the first opportunity he called for Valentin and said, "We are amazed at your Christian witness and thank the Lord for you."

Valentin Badibanga responded, "I don't understand why all of you missionaries are so surprised. When I was here in school learning about Jesus, I read one day that he told his followers to do to others as they'd like them to do to them. Isn't that what the Bible says? Well, that's all I did. I just did what Jesus said!"

Jim Bertsche