

JESUS DIED FOR ALL THE CHILDREN

Ting-a-ling goes the church bell every Sunday morning, more often than not very much on the dot of 8 a.m., which is somewhat of an achievement for Ntonda. This is to summon our Sunday School children for 9 a.m. However, usually before this, we see little groups of children making their way past our house. Some stare in, wondering what is going on inside. Others brave it and come begging a drink of water. 9 a.m. comes and we wend our way to either primary or big school, in schoolroom or church respectively. Visual aids for the day's lesson are handed out and explained to the teachers. You will probably know that twice yearly special courses are held for Sunday School teachers and at these courses the visual aids are shown and explained in relation to the lessons so that those who attend these courses are, or should be, au fait with their visual aids. However, there are teachers who, for one reason or another, do not attend. Maybe they are day school teachers and cannot get away from their duties.

Before the first hymn is sung, we cast an eye over the children, boys one side, girls another. Here and there one is sucking a mango, others have reserve supplies in their pockets. Sugar cane is being nibbled at, the remains being spat out on the floor. One has a bottle containing roasted maize which is under inspection. So around we go collecting up the "goods", lining them up on a table in full view of the owners, so that they can keep an eagle eye on their property. "Put your tickets in your pockets, please," we say. Two little girls are removed to sit on another bench, having been rather unsuccessfully trying to squeeze themselves on to an already overflowing one. One little girl has a baby brother clinging to her back like a baby monkey. A word of warning is given here to the effect that he must stay at home in future, until he is big enough to come on his own two feet.

On the first Sunday morning of the month they bring their offerings for the collection, so this morning we have the box handy as little hands clutch their gifts of maize cobs or perhaps the odd spring onion. The opening hymn is frequently "I am so glad that Jesus loves me." "Ndikondwa kuti Yesu akonda" goes the chorus. They love it and sing it lustily. A prayer follows and as one looks around, little eyes peer through parted hands at their neighbour! Next comes the memory verse to be learned and repeated. Something short usually, perhaps Matthew 19:26. Then we pass to the choruses. Whilst we in the Primary seek to teach and help the little ones, close by in the church the older children meet, led by Mr. Alan Dambo, a saved

teacher at our Ntonda School, whom some of you may know. Between our choruses, we catch a well-known refrain coming from them. "... rolled away, rolled away, rolled away, and the burden of my sin rolled away." "Now who will choose a chorus?" we ask. One or two hands pop up. "Kumadzi" is a never failing request. In English it is as a near equivalent to "The Lord's my Shepherd". "Joy, joy, joy..." might be next. "We are building day by day..." and so we go through the repertoire with actions where appropriate. Recently they learned a new one, brought to us through a Child Evangelism Course For Sunday School Teachers. "Stop! and let me tell you what the Lord has done for me!" Someone is invited to come to the front, and at the word "stop" a little red flag is waved. Most of the children love to come forward.

Next follows the Bible story for the day as indicated by the Sunday School Syllabus. If there is a large number of children, they split up into small classes and are led off outside by their teacher. Alternatively, there may be only one or two teachers so the children may stay together, one person giving them the story, with the help of visual aids.

We close with a hymn. They love "Jesus high in Glory" and a prayer. Before the last AMEN is said, attendance tickets appear on all sides from pockets, between a Christmas card, wrapped up in a piece of newspaper or occasionally from a little purse or flat tin. Great care is taken of tickets and they MUST be signed at all costs, as this might mean a little prize at the end of the year. We have some lovely dollies beautifully dressed, combs, bags, pens, pencils, notebooks and many other things which they will enjoy, from kind friends at home.

Sunday School over we are met with several pairs of little hands, waiting to carry flannel-board, hymn books, Bible, basket, etc. They love to do it, but it sometimes means a little shirt, a pair of trousers or a dress to a needy recipient, or even a sweetie! One little fellow whom I have a particular soft spot for, one day indicated that he would love a little present (praizi). Then he whispered confidentially in my ear his desire for a galimoto, which is a car! I never discovered whether he had an eye on one of our landrovers, or a ride in one!

Will you who read this pray for our children in the Sunday School? The opportunity is ours today. Then pray for all who teach them and seek to lead them to a personal experience of salvation through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May we be available channels through which the Holy Spirit can work.

J. MURRAY.