

Story: As Dawn Approaches

November 27, 2022

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:11-14

As you know, one of the really important questions in the life of any animal – bird, fish, reptile, or mammal – is:

“When is breakfast?”

For most animals the next question is likely to be “where is breakfast?” Whether you’re a hunting animal that has to find something with meat on it, or whether you’re a plant-eating animal, the fact is that you probably haven’t gone to sleep where breakfast can be found. Even the nectar-eating birds of the ohī’a forest have to find a tree in blossom in the morning.

Still, the first question is: “When is breakfast?”

The kolea has to learn two answers to this question. As you know, kolea emerge from eggs laid in Alaska. So the first thing a kolea chick has to learn when it’s heading out on its own is when the worms come out.

In fact, kolea don’t ask the question, “When is breakfast?” because the answer is always, “When the worms come out.” So they skip to the next question, which is, as you’d guess, “When do the worms come out?”

“When do the worms come out?” a young kolea asked his mother.

She didn’t have a great answer, because she wasn’t a great thinker among the kolea. She knew a lot of things, but she didn’t put them into words. You could count on her to be right there when the worms poked their heads out of the ground, but she couldn’t tell you what she’d noticed to make her go there. If she’d been a human being she’d have been one of those amazing cooks who, if you ask, “how much butter did you put in that cake?” would reply, “About the right amount,” and not really know. And the cake would be delicious.

That’s why she said, “The worms come out when they do,” which wasn’t helpful, but she did the best she could.

He managed to find worms by following his mother around, and since she didn’t mind that worked pretty well. But then came the time to go to Hawai’i for the first time. He wouldn’t have her nearby there – or rather, here.

“When do the worms come out?” he asked.

“When they do,” she answered, and that was the best he got.

Here in Hawai’i, he settled into the new job of living on his own. Worms were hard to come by, but there were plenty of grubs and spiders and so on. He did fine. He missed worms, though.

“When do the worms come out?” he asked himself out loud.

“As dawn approaches,” said a voice from nearby.

It was a myna, which took him by surprise. Mynas usually talk to each other – or rather, they argue with each other a lot. “What was that?” he asked.

“The worms come out as dawn approaches,” said the myna, which then turned away from him to enter a furious argument with another myna about... well, something. Anything. Who knows?

The kolea thought about the things his mother had done. She’d begun moving about as the sky grew brighter in the east, and flown to grassy places that worms liked. She chose cool places with some heavy dew on them or a fine rainy morning. In the cool wetness, worms were plentiful. When the ground dried and the sun warmed everything, the worms disappeared underground again.

“As the dawn approaches,” murmured the kolea.

There are plenty of things that require more examination and thought to understand than when to find a worm. Most things have something that gives you a notion that things are changing, that something is coming. For many things in life, there’s some sort of sign: like the approaching dawn.

by Eric Anderson