

Story: Perfectly Picky

April 14, 2024

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36-48

I believe I mentioned a few weeks ago that if there's something edible up in the ohī'a and koa forests – bugs, berries, fruit, sap, nectar, caterpillars, and so on – there's an 'amakihi eating it. They're not picky eaters. They're enthusiastic eaters.

Except for one young 'amakihi. She was perfectly picky.

I don't know how it got started, but I do know that early on she'd only eat bugs that she'd seen fly. I guess that meant they were fresher, somehow? Which meant that she would no longer eat the crawling bugs or the caterpillars, and there would be no spiders in her diet.

I know. You're thinking, good choice. Along with you, I am pretty happy not to eat bugs at all. We are people, though, and not 'amakihi.

Then she wouldn't eat tree sap that came from cracks in the bark. I know – again, it sounds like a good choice for a human. But if you're not going to eat tree sap that comes from cracks in the bark, how are you going to get to it at all? An 'amakihi beak isn't a good shape for making holes in bark. She'd removed another entry from her diet.

Then she decided not to eat fruit or berries unless it was perfectly ripe. That cut out a whole lot of fruit that was almost ripe, and it cut out a lot of fruit that was just past ripe, all of which feed other 'amakihi perfectly well.

Her family started to notice that she was maybe getting a little thinner.

When she decided that the only nectar she'd sip would be from perfectly formed ohī'a flowers, that really did it. Go up to the ohī'a forests and you'll find plenty of flowers on the trees. But are they perfectly formed into red puffballs? Not exactly. Some flowers show just a few scarlet tendrils. Some form ovals or just plain look squashed.

She wouldn't eat from them. She wouldn't even eat the flying bugs that landed on them.

She was hunting through an ohī'a tree that was bright red with blossoms – but very few of them perfect blossoms – when the branch jumped with another bird landing. She looked up and saw her grandmother watching her. Grandmother watched her pick over a big bunch of lehua, sip from none of them, and hop over to another, and sip from none of them.

“What are you doing, granddaughter?” asked grandmother.

“Eating,” said the picky ‘amakihi. “I’m hungry.”

“Eating what?” asked grandmother, who hadn’t actually seen her granddaughter eat anything.

“Nectar,” said granddaughter.

“Where?” asked grandmother.

“From the good ones,” said her granddaughter. “I only eat from the perfect flowers, Tutu.”

Grandmother looked at the tree full of blossoms and didn’t see many perfect ones. “You won’t find many perfect ones, granddaughter,” she said. “Not here, and not anywhere.”

She watched the picky ‘amakihi skip perfectly good (if imperfectly formed) ohī’a flowers for a little longer and said, “I think you should eat from some of the imperfect ones, young one.”

Granddaughter, who was annoyed, poked her beak toward a flower that basically had two red tendrils and no visible nectar, and said, “You mean like that one?”

“No, child,” said grandmother. “Not like that one. There’s nothing there. But the question isn’t whether a flower is perfect or not. The question is whether it feeds you.”

The picky ‘amakihi thought about this a while. And she really was hungry. With a glance at her grandmother, she put her beak into a bright red ohī’a flower which, to be honest, wasn’t perfect, and fed.

by Eric Anderson