

# Story: 'Apapane Leadership

July 21, 2024

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

After the eggs have hatched and the chicks have learned to fly, many of the birds of the ohī'a and koa forest will come together in mixed flocks of 'apapane, 'amakihi, 'akepa, and 'alawi. They stay together to find ohī'a and mamane trees in blossom, which would also have attracted some tasty bugs.

It was the custom of one flock on the slopes of Mauna Loa to select a leader each week to keep the flock together and organize a watch for dangerous or suspicious creatures like cats, 'io, pueo, and, well, people. The leader would look around for trees bright with flowers and guide the hungry birds toward them, while making sure nobody got left behind. It wasn't the easiest thing for a bird to do, but most of them handled it pretty well.

One 'apapane had been eagerly awaiting his turn to be flock leader. He was no longer that young, having seen a few summers and winters. He was something of a silent critic of the weekly leaders, silently scoring them on his own checklist. That one didn't spot the mamane tree in blossom as fast as he had. This other one had been slow to get the birds moving. And this other one hadn't properly spotted the watcher birds for 'io. They'd spotted the hawk in plenty of time anyway, but it hadn't been *right*.

At last came the week when the birds in the flock chose him as their leader for the next week. He was proud. He was excited. He was also... going to do something fairly complicated for the first time, and he was absolutely convinced that he knew exactly what should happen.

The result, the next morning, was a lot of birds screeching at one another, with their purported leader screaming the most and the loudest. He screeched at the ones who were supposed to be watching when they perched on a branch other than the one he'd selected. He screeched when they were ready to head to a new set of trees, and screeched when one or two birds headed off in the wrong direction. He screeched when a bird remained behind, and nearly pecked his tail as he flew right behind him to get him to the rest of the flock. He screeched when it was time to nap. He screeched when it was time to settle down to sleep.

When he turned about, one of the older birds, an 'apapane kupuna, was perched behind him. He opened his beak to screech at her, but shut it quickly. He knew better than to screech at her.

"What have you been doing?" she said, "and don't screech at me."

"I've been leading," he said, "like I'm supposed to."

"You haven't been leading like you're supposed to," she said rather severely. "You've been driving like you're not supposed to. You've had birds who know perfectly well what to do confused and upset. Some of them went hungry today. While you were chasing that one bird there were two others that set off in the wrong direction and I had to go get them."

"They should have listened to me!" he said.

"How could they," she asked, "when you didn't give them a clear direction?"

He was silent for a moment.

"You'll try it again tomorrow," said the kupuna 'apapane, "and tomorrow you'll plan, and you'll chirp softly, and you'll listen to the birds who know what they're doing, and you'll keep an eye on things and let other birds know when there's a problem that they can help you with."

"Be wise," she said, "and attentive, and assuring. That will keep the flock with you, and fed, and comforted, and safe."

Oh, it took some work, I tell you. But she was nearby the next day whenever he opened his beak to screech, and only one or two screeches got out. The day after he didn't screech at all. By the time his week as leader was over, they followed him gratefully and gladly. Because he learned from his mistakes, and he learned how to lead.

*by Eric Anderson*