

Story: The 'Apapane Bully

July 28, 2024

2 Samuel 11:1-15

John 6:1-21

Last week I told you a story about an 'apapane who, when he was selected to lead a mixed flock of 'apapane, 'amakihī, 'akepa, and 'alawī, learned a lesson about proper leadership. He may not have liked learning it, but he learned it, and in just two or three days.

This week, I'm sorry to say, the story is about an 'apapane who didn't learn that lesson in their week as leader, and... Well, maybe I should just tell the story.

He was big for an 'apapane (not so big for an 'io). That made him bigger than pretty much all of the birds, especially the smaller 'akepa and 'alawī. Other 'apapane tended to hop or turn out of his way when he came to their branch or crossed his flight path. Even i'iwi, who tend to be the more aggressive of the forest birds, learned to recognize this 'apapane and stayed out of his way.

It seemed natural that such a big, strong, confident bird should be selected as leader. Right? Leadership is what big, strong, confident people – er, birds – are for. Right?

It didn't go well.

First of all, he didn't really pay attention to the other birds. He'd just give orders. "Go find a better tree!" he ordered one bird, who was nearly caught by an 'io that the leader hadn't troubled to look for. "Let's go!" he shouted when they headed to a new tree, but he didn't bother to make sure that all the birds heard it. Half of them stayed behind. When he discovered that, he flew back to the old tree, screamed and shouted, and even beat at one or two of them with his wings.

Worst of all, he picked on the smaller birds. He'd find 'akepa sipping nectar and he'd push them out of the way. He pecked at 'alawī with his beak if they got close. And if they weren't close, he'd hop over and peck them.

In short, he'd crossed the line from "leader" to "bully."

Flock elders talked to him, and the next day went the same. His parents talked to him, and the next day went the same. Flock elders came in a group with his grandparents – always listen to tutu, right? – and it went exactly the same the next day.

The flock had had enough.

The last morning of his leadership, five flock elders perched before him. "Just so you know," they said, "you will not be elected leader again."

"How can that be?" he screeched. "I'm biggest and strongest. I'm made to lead!"

"We require leadership," they told him. "We will not tolerate bullying."

"You'll do what I tell you!" he shouted.

"No," they said. "Never again."

Every single bird in the flock turned away from him. Not one turned in his direction. Not one followed his screeched orders. When he flew over to peck at an 'akepa, ten other birds flew over and formed a living shield to protect her.

"You'll be sorry!" he shrieked and flew away.

But as far as I know, that flock has never been sorry that they know the difference between leadership and bullying, and that they insist on leadership, and send bullying away.

by Eric Anderson