

Story: Everybody's Songs

September 22, 2024

Jeremiah 11:18-20

Mark 9:30-37

Everyone thought she was one of the best singers among the 'apapane. Her notes were clear, her improvisations were delightful, and she had the breath to sing long bubbling musical runs. Other 'apapane used to listen for her in the mornings, and if they heard her, they'd take off in her direction.

It turned out that she used to sing loudest and longest when she found a grove of ohī'a with lots of blossoms, so everybody who flew into the neighborhood got a good meal. She'd sing, however, even in a tree between flowering times. When she did, the other 'apapane – and the akepa, and the 'alawi, and the 'amakihi, and even the i'iwi – settled into nearby trees to listen.

It was like having a great concert every day.

She couldn't help noticing that a fair number of birds got a free lunch, or breakfast, or dinner out of her songs. At the start she didn't mind – she was pretty flattered that everyone flew to hear her sing – but as time went on it started to rankle. "Can't they find their own trees?" she grumped to her brother one day, and if he had anything useful to say, she didn't listen.

Then she had a bad scare. She'd landed on a branch near to the ground, which she rarely did, and began to sing. Suddenly the branch heaved with a heavy weight. She fluttered into the air, taken by surprise, and only then noticed the hunting cat which had leapt onto her branch and only just missed her.

She flew higher into another tree, whistling with alarm, and watched while the cat climbed back to the ground and disappeared into the forest.

The next day the sun rose, but her voice didn't rise. The day grew brighter, but nobody heard her song. Other 'apapane and 'amakihi and mejiro and the rest begin to sing, but she remained silent.

She found a place deep within some leafy ohī'a branches and hid from the world.

They noticed that she wasn't singing that day, the other birds did, but they mostly thought she'd gone to another part of the forest and would be back soon. But one day became two, and two became four, and four became over a week and nobody had heard her song. They began to look around, hoping to find her well, and terribly afraid that something bad had happened.

Her mother found her – mothers often have a talent for finding their children – still huddled in her ohī'a tree, silent and afraid. She told her mother about what had happened with the cat.

“I don’t want to sing ever again,” she said.

“Your songs are beautiful,” said her mother. “Everybody loves you for them.”

“Everybody follows me because they think they’ll eat well,” said the daughter. “Somebody else can do that. Not me.”

“Listen for a moment, daughter,” said the mother, and the two were quiet. The forest, however, was not. The calls and songs of the forest birds sailed out over the trees.

“Listen to that,” said mother. “It’s everybody’s song.”

“Won’t they attract cats?” asked the singer.

“They might,” admitted her mother, “but there are ways to sing beyond their reach. Mostly, though, realize that it’s your voice, and your melodies, but it’s not really your song. It’s everybody’s song when you share it, greater and more wonderful than you know.

“What do you think, daughter? Can you sing with everybody’s song?”

In answer, the young ‘apapane opened her beak and sang.

by Eric Anderson