

Story: The Generous I'iwi

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Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Mark 10:17-31

I'iwi are not known for their generosity. They tend to chase other i'iwi away if one comes too close, and they have an expansive notion of what "too close" means. They're willing to put up with other birds, most of the time, but if there's an ohia tree full of flowers to be sipped at, well. Then things can get exciting, and they'll chase the 'apapane and the 'amakihi away.

One day an i'iwi was perched in a tree and saw a family of four humans come along. They stopped for a moment nearby and the big humans gave the little humans the last two cookies out of a little bag. The littlest human, a boy, took big bites. The next-littlest human, a slightly older and taller girl, nibbled at her cookie, enjoying its sweetness.

When the little boy had finished his cookie, the parents announced that it was time to keep walking, and their son burst into tears. He was tired. He didn't like walking. Most of all, he was still hungry, because he hadn't had enough cookie.

But there were no more cookies in the little bag.

Big sister – who wasn't that much bigger, remember – looked at her cookie. More than half of it was left. Without a word she broke it in half and gave a piece to her little brother. He stopped crying – mostly, he snuffled some more – but the two of them finished their cookies together, and then the family moved on.

The i'iwi was impressed. Half a cookie had done so much good for the little boy, and also for the parents who wanted to comfort him but couldn't. Half a cookie wasn't a big thing, but it made a big difference.

The i'iwi decided that he'd make a difference, too. Not with cookie halves, which he wasn't going to eat anyway, but with ohia flowers. He'd bring those to the hungry birds of the forest.

If he could figure out how.

An i'iwi's long curved beak is pretty good for sipping nectar, but it's not that good for snipping flowers from branches or carrying them. His first few experiments showed him that he damaged more flowers beyond use than he actually carried. He managed to get one blossom in his beak, however, and flew off to find a hungry bird to give it to.

After a few minutes, he found a section of the forest where the trees weren't blossoming much, and then he found a sad-looking 'apapane perched on a leafy, but flowerless, branch. He landed and carefully placed the flower on some leaves before he said, "Here. You look hungry. Take a good sip."

The 'apapane looked surprised and then puzzled, but said, "Thank you," before dipping her beak into the flower. Sadly, there wasn't much nectar to be found. Much of it had dried out when it was plucked from the tree and carried through the air.

"I'm sorry," said the i'iwi. "I'll go get you another one."

"Wouldn't it be easier," asked the 'apapane, "to show me the tree you found it on?"

"Why, yes," said the i'iwi. "It would. Why didn't I think of that?"

Cookies don't grow on trees. Sometimes if you want to share, you have to divide them up. But sometimes if you want to share, you can bring your friend to the flower, not the flower to the friend. However you share, though, remember that small things can make a big difference, and that giving to someone goes a long way.

by Eric Anderson