

Story: Start with You

December 15, 2024

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

The nene was going to change the world.

He wanted to change a lot of things. Some of them, he thought, might be more difficult than he could actually do. He wanted 'ohelo to grow more evenly through year, for example. Without learning how to plant and cultivate, which is hard to do when you have wings rather than hands, he didn't think he'd get that accomplished anytime soon. Still. It's nice to have a goal.

Mostly, though, he had ambitions to change the way that creatures interacted with one another on Hawai'i Island.

Most creatures in the forest don't bother one another very much. Yes, the i'iwi gets possessive about flowering ohia trees sometimes. Yes, the 'apapane get touchy around their nests. And there are mongoose that eat eggs. The nene thought that could change, too, but like the 'ohelo idea, he thought it would take some time to persuade the mongoose to turn vegetarian.

What he most wanted to change, however, was the careless actions of human beings.

Other creatures don't bother nene much, but human beings do. They come walking up where nene are feeding, they pick food the nene need to eat, and worst of all, they drive fast through places where nene walk and rest. I'm afraid that the biggest danger to a nene these days is getting hit by a car.

So our ambitious nene developed a plan to stand by the side of a road and talk to the people driving by. Or, well, honk at the people driving by. Yell at the people driving by.

I'm afraid it didn't go well. The cars went by at the same high speeds they had before. A few of them stopped instead. One person even got out and went over to try to pet the nene, who decided that flying away was the best thing to do.

He watched for some time as the cars raced by at the same high speed with no change at all.

It made him sad.

Another set of wings fluttered next to him. It was a curious 'elepaio. "What were you doing?" she asked.

The nene told her he was trying to get people to drive more carefully.

“That takes a lot of doing,” the ‘elepaio observed. “There are a lot of people to persuade. How is it going so far?”

The nene admitted that it wasn’t working so far.

“There’s an easier place to start,” mused the ‘elepaio. “What if you started with yourself?”

“What do you mean?” asked the nene.

“It’s right to be concerned about what others do,” said the ‘elepaio, “and to get them to change it. But the first step and the easiest step is to do what you can about yourself. Step back from the road. Walk further away. Do what you did a few minutes ago, and fly away from foolish people.

“You’ve got to start somewhere,” said the ‘elepaio. “Start with you.”

by Eric Anderson