

# Story: Small Differences

January 19, 2025

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

The akiapola'au is a small bird. It has a unique beak, with a short lower beak, and a longer top beak that hooks down in front of the lower beak. It may look odd, but the lower beak can drill into tree bark after bugs and grubs, and the top beak hooks them to draw them out.

If that seems strange, just imagine that you had to chase the chocolate chips through a cookie, and you might think a double-purpose beak sounds pretty good.

An akiapola'au is a small bird. It isn't any bigger than a saffron finch or a yellow-beaked cardinal. There aren't very many of them, either, perhaps about 1,900 here on Hawai'i Island. There aren't any anywhere else in the world.

I think they're pretty wonderful and pretty special.

A youngish akiapola'au, however, wasn't certain about this. I don't know whether he knew that birds like him live only on this one island, but I'm certain he knew there weren't a lot of them around. Think about how you know so many of the people of Hilo, and how many of them you call "auntie" or "uncle." After a couple of years, he knew pretty much every akiapola'au there was, and he called a lot of them "auntie" or "uncle."

"There aren't very many of us, and we're very small birds," he said to himself one day. "How will we ever make a difference in the world?" He had dreams, he did. He wanted to make the world better. He wanted someone else to benefit because he lived. He wanted to love the world somehow.

"But how?" he asked himself. "I'm too small to move anything bigger than a caterpillar with this beak of mine. And if we gathered all of us together and flapped our wings as hard as we could, what could we akiapola'au do but make a light breeze that the trade winds would blow away?"

It made him sad.

"Auntie," he asked one day, "how can I make a difference?"

"What makes you think you don't?" she asked.

"I'm too small to move anything," he said, "and there aren't enough of us together to make anything different." Sadly, he dug out another little worm, hooked it with his upper bill, and ate it.

"What did you just do?" asked his auntie.

"Nothing," he said, startled. "Well. I ate a worm."

"Look at that tree over there," said his auntie. "What do you see?"

"I see a sick tree," said the younger akiapola'au. "It's had so many caterpillars and worms that it's fading. It might be dying."

"What about this tree?" asked auntie.

"This tree is doing better," he said.

"Why?"

"It doesn't have so many worms and bugs," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because... I'm not sure. Is it because we've been eating them?"

"It is. And not just us. Other birds do the same. Between us, we're helping this tree stay healthy."

"But that's just one tree," he protested.

"I feed from lots of trees, and you know you do, too," said his auntie. "That's still a difference.

"You and I are small in the world," she told him, "but these trees have better, stronger lives because of us. We make a difference for them, and they make a difference for us. For that matter, they make a difference for all the creatures of this forest. Our small difference contributes to everyone's lives. You make the world a little better every day."

*by Eric Anderson*