

Story: A Tree Falls

July 20, 2025

Amos 8:1-12

Luke 10:38-42

The oma'o's heart was in the right place, mostly. The physical heart was, of course, in the right place in his chest and beating regularly. His emotional and spiritual heart was maybe a little bit off to the side, because while he was thinking a little bit about another living thing, it has to be said that he mostly was thinking about himself.

It was a thinnish koa tree that he chose to protect. Its leaves were pretty thick even if its trunk wasn't the widest. He liked the flavor of its flowers. There were some other birds that did, too, and he began to chase them away whenever he saw them. "I'm preventing them from over-feeding," he said to himself. "That way the flowers can bloom and the fruit will grow."

There were also bugs and caterpillars on the trunk and branches of the tree. Some of those he ate, because an oma'o will eat just about anything. Most of them he ignored. Oma'o might eat anything, but when there's fruit around, they'll eat that.

But he also wouldn't let other birds approach the tree to eat the bugs, either. He chased away 'apapane and 'amakihi, 'alawi and 'elepaio. He even chased away the hook-beaked 'akiapola'au after he caught one digging into the tree bark with its short lower beak.

"Stop digging into this tree!" he shrieked. "You're hurting it!"

"This caterpillar in the bark is hurting it," said the 'akiapola'au. "I'm getting it out."

"Not while I'm around!" shouted the oma'o, and chased the other bird away.

As the days went on, the koa leaves started to turn funny colors and droop. When the oma'o landed on a branch, it didn't spring back up the way it had. Twigs dried up and fell away. Leaves littered the ground around the base of the trunk.

"That tree is sick," said an 'elepaio to the oma'o. "It's got too many bugs. Let us help!"

"No," said the oma'o. "You'll hurt it."

"Look at all those caterpillar tracks below the bark," said an 'akiapola'au. "Let us dig them out. The tree will get better."

“I’m not letting you anywhere near this tree,” said the oma’o.

Even he had to admit that things weren’t going well. He no longer ate flowers from the tree, because there weren’t any. He visited other trees for fruit. There were plenty of bugs to eat, but when he ate some, there were always more.

When a tree falls in the forest, it does make a noise. The birds hear it. And they cry about it.

The birds heard the oma’o’s tree fall. And they cried.

“Why are you crying?” the oma’o asked an ‘elepaio. “It was my tree, not yours.”

“I’m crying because that tree could have been a place to nest for decades,” said the ‘elepaio. “It would have sheltered my family in the rain,” said an ‘amakihi. “It would have fed my children and my grandchildren,” said an ‘akiapola’au.

Looking around, the oma’o realized that not only had he hurt the tree he’d called his own, he’d hurt all the birds around. Not only that, but he’d hurt future generations.

When a tree falls in the forest, the sound of its fall echoes into the future.

by Eric Anderson