

Story: The Rich Ae'o

August 3, 2025

Psalm 49:1-12

Luke 12:13-21

"How would an ae'o get rich?" she wondered.

How would an ae'o (that's a black-necked stilt in English) even think about getting rich? You might be wondering, and I would be wondering, too. This particular ae'o had been listening to some human beings who were visiting the Hawaiian shoreline near where she hunted for shrimp and bugs in an old fishpond. The people had been talking about how wealthy they were and how glad they were to be rich.

I'm afraid a lot of it was pure foolishness, and some of it was pure hard-heartedness, because they talked about how they paid their workers as little as possible and bought things for low unfair prices and sold things for high unfair prices. Frankly, most of that went over the ae'o's head, despite how long her neck and her bright pink legs were. Still, the humans seemed pleased about it, so she determined to get rich.

"How would an ae'o get rich?" she wondered.

She wondered about it as she and her husband prepared a nest. An ae'o nest is pretty simple. They make a hollow in the ground, then line it with grasses and even some of their downier feathers. As they were working, she noticed something bright on the ground. It was a white pebble.

"I know how to be rich!" she said. "I'll line our nest with bright things."

Her husband had no idea what to make of that, and even less when she flew out and around and returned with odd things that didn't make much sense in an ae'o nest. She found more pebbles, which poked at you when sitting on the nest. She found plastic bottle lids, which weren't any more comfortable than the pebbles. She brought in crushed soda cans that someone had carelessly dropped somewhere, which took up a lot of room, and she brought in bits of discarded paper with the shiny photos of visitor brochures.

"Why are you doing this?" asked her husband. "To get rich," she told him, and had no better answer.

It was her grandmother, of course, who came by at last to take a look at the bright and shining nest. She was settled uncomfortably into it, wedged in by cans and bottles and avoiding the sharp bits of glass that a sensible bird would have left where they were.

“You call this being rich?” said tutu ae’o.

“Of course,” she replied.

“It looks more like this nest is demanding more of you than it’s giving you in return. It’s supposed to protect your eggs. Is it doing that?”

Indeed, the eggs were going to have a hard time finding space amidst all the hard and sharp surfaces in the nest. Even our rich ae’o had to admit that.

“This isn’t how an ae’o gets rich anyway,” said tutu. “We get rich with family. We get rich with sunshine. We get rich with a big school of shrimp. We get rich with the things the world gives us, things that are never ours, but which we enjoy when they come.

“Give up this empty nest, granddaughter,” she said. “Come lay your eggs someplace comfortable and safe. Then you’ll be rich with a new generation.”

Without a word, the ae’o stood up and walked off to build a new nest with her husband. She never looked back. She looked ahead to being rich in love.

by Eric Anderson