

Story: Feeding the I'iwi

August 24, 2025

Isaiah 58:9-14

Luke 13:10-17

Up on the slopes of Mauna Loa, where the forest birds gather into little flock during the summer, there was one little flock that had decided to get itself better organized. They figured out who was the best in the flock at finding food, and other birds that were good at spotting bad weather. They found places to shelter when it was hot in the middle of the day and places to start foraging when it was cool in the morning. Each bird got a buddy to make sure nobody got lost. Each bird got a buddy to make sure that when they were feeding, everybody found out about it. Each bird got a buddy to make sure that everybody got fed and sheltered and safe.

The birds agreed that it was a pretty good system.

"One more thing," said one of the birds who had been a big part of the organizing. "No i'iwi."

"What do you mean?" said an 'amakihi. "They don't like to fly in flocks anyway."

"What I mean is," said the first bird, "that if we see any i'iwi, we chase them away."

That didn't sound good to most of the other birds, who were far more accustomed to flying away from a chasing i'iwi than chasing one.

"I don't think that's going to work," said an 'akepa. The other birds chorused their agreement.

"Well, all right," said the first bird, an 'apapane. "but we won't encourage them, either. Make sure when you call that there's no i'iwi listening. We've organized to feed ourselves, not them."

And so it was. There was one 'apapane in the flock, though, who thought that sounded a little unfair. Sure, she'd been chased by i'iwi more than once and hadn't enjoyed it, but she didn't see any reason for even a grumpy bird to go hungry.

It turned out to be a tough season in their area of Mauna Loa. It was dry, and the trees weren't blossoming much. There were a few spots around where a small grove would bloom all once, but they were hard to find. The finder birds were a real blessing. Without them the flock would have been much hungrier.

One day the scout birds had to work really hard. They looked this way and that without finding much. Finally one pair spotted a little group of trees with blossoms, and they called the flock. The other birds followed gratefully.

That's when one of them spotted an i'iwi. "Remember!" he shouted out. "Don't tell the i'iwi where we're going!" Most of the flock, in fact, detoured so that the i'iwi wouldn't notice them.

But not the one 'apapane. She couldn't bear the thought of another bird going hungry, even a grumpy i'iwi. She took a turn over the tree where the i'iwi was and called out a quick, "Follow me!" As she flew along the i'iwi followed, and when they arrived at the little stand of blossoming trees, the i'iwi settled into a tree as far away from the others as it could.

"Why did you do that?" asked her buddy bird. "You broke the rule. You brought an i'iwi!"

"Of course I did," she said. "Have you been hungry? Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes, of course," he said, "and no I didn't."

"So was he," she told him, "and I'm sure he didn't like it either."

"But he's an i'iwi!" he told her. "He's a bully and a jerk."

"And he's hungry," she said. "Everybody should get help when they're hungry."

From the adjacent tree, the i'iwi let out an unpleasant chirp, but that's because i'iwi aren't great singers. The two 'apapane, however, knew that he'd said, "Thank you." Nobody likes to be hungry, and everybody should get help when they are.

by Eric Anderson