Story: How to Love an I'iwi

October 25, 2026

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18
Matthew 22:34-46

I'm afraid that in the mountain forests, i'iwi have a bad reputation. I've mentioned this before. It's pretty common that they get possessive of a grove of ohi'a in blossom, and they'll chase other birds away, especially 'apapane. It's not a pretty habit, and not all i'iwi do it, but the bullies among them are pretty blatant about it and they get a lot of attention – especially if you're an 'apapane flying away with a bullying i'iwi right behind.

'Apapane don't enjoy that sort of thing, and nobody should have to experience it.

A lot of birds get feisty and protective when they have eggs in nests, and that's true of 'apapane as well as i'iwi. During summer, when the young ones are flying on their own, they gather flocks that may include not just 'apapane, but also 'amakihi and 'akepa. And from time to time, an i'iwi will seek to join.

That's just what happened in one flock up the slopes of Mauna Kea. It was a youngling, enjoying his first Hawaiian summer. When he came to join the flock, the 'apapane had a big discussion.

The loudest of the birds was one who rarely fled from i'iwi. He was fairly big for an 'apapane and certainly brave. He had even been known to squawk back at i'iwi sometimes – though he'd also been known to fly away if he'd been startled. Truth be told, he resented that. A lot.

"We can't let this bird into the flock," he insisted. "He'll start bullying everyone and we won't any of us get enough to eat."

"There's plenty to eat," said some of the other birds, "if you look long enough. And i'iwi are good at finding nectar. He'll be a big help."

"It doesn't matter whether he can help find it if he won't let us eat it," insisted the first bird. "He'll chase us away from it. Or he won't tell us about it in the first place."

This went on for a while. All the birds had something to say, but it was that first bird who had the most to say. All the birds said something: except one. This bird was small and rather quiet. Of all the 'apapane, he had probably been chased by i'iwi the most.

"What do you think?" asked a friend of his. "You get chased a lot."

“I think we are all birds of the forest,” said this quiet ‘apapane. “I think gathering as many of us together as possible is good for all of us. I think we’re supposed to love one another.”

“But they’re not being loving to you!” shouted the first bird. “You can’t love them.”

“It doesn’t matter how I feel,” said the quiet ‘apapane. “It matters that I do for another bird what I’d do for myself. And I’d let myself into the flock. Any day of the week.”

At this point the young i'iwi hopped forward and quietly said, “I chased you a couple times, didn’t I? I’m really sorry. I won’t do it again. I’ll try to act more like you just did.”

“It’s all right,” said the quiet ‘apapane. “But how about it? Can you help us find some ohi’a flowers?”

And the i'iwi did.

by Eric Anderson