Story: The Useless Bees

November 15, 2026

Judges 4:1-7
Matthew 25:14-30

Have you ever seen a honeybee?

They like the flowers in my backyard, such as this one. Much like the honeycreeper birds of Hawai'i, they feed on nectar, the sweet syrup that flowers produce, and along the way they carry pollen around, which flowers need to make seeds. A bee carrying pollen from one flower to another is doing it a service it can't do itself. Before honeybees came to Hawai'i Island, other insects and, yes, birds, carried pollen from flower to flower.

There is something I can tell you about this bee. This bee is a she. How do I know? Because most bees are female. I mean, for about every 100 female bees there's one male bee.

The female bees leave the hive, fly from flower to flower, bring back nectar for the other bees, and incidentally pollinate the flowers. There's a reason they're usually called worker bees. There's one other female bee in the hive, called the queen, and what she mostly does is lay eggs so that they'll hatch into more bees. All in all, the female bees do a lot, and do it pretty much from sunrise to sunset.

In contrast, the males tend to leave the hive, hang out with other males, and wait for a queen to come out looking for a mate. That's about it.

A worker one day noticed a few males in a tree near to the hive. She'd had a busy morning. She'd been out and harvested nectar, and come back to the have. Then she'd done it again. Then she'd done it again. That's a lot of flying and a lot of landing and a lot of taking off and a lot of work.

Then she saw the males lazing about in the tree. She got pretty indignant. There they were, bees of the hive, and just because they were male they thought they didn't need to work.

"What a useless bunch of bees," she said aloud.

"Who?" asked a friend.

"Those males up there. Look at them doing nothing. What good are they?"

"I never thought about it," said the friend, who hadn't.

“Useless males. Useless males. They’re just a bunch of useless males,” said the hard-working bee and she left the nectar in a spot in the honeycomb so that it would become honey.

“Not so useless,” said a voice, and the startled hard-working bee turned to see the hive’s queen had spoken to her.

“Not so useless?” she asked.

“Not so useless,” said the queen. “Without males, there are no eggs, and without eggs, there’s no female workers, no queens, and for that matter no males.”

“But why don’t they work?” asked the worker.

“They’re getting ready,” said the queen. “They don’t know when a new queen will rise to find a mate. Neither do we. They have to be nearby, because if they’re not, there’s no mate and no eggs and no hive. They’re doing what they need to do.

“I know you didn’t know, daughter. But try to be generous about what you don’t know about other bees, and other beings. Ask and you may learn that nobody, no living creature, can ever be called useless.”

by Eric Anderson