

Matthew Izzo

Every summer for the last four years I have spent one week of my break doing home repair on Native American reservations in California. One of the things I learned during those trips that surprised me the most was that no one on the reservations owns the land on which their house is built. The tribe holds the land in keeping for the people of the tribe because they believe that ultimately the Earth belongs to the Creator. They see themselves as children of the Creator, and the land is just being loaned to them for their life. The idea that we do not inherit the land from our ancestors but borrow it from our children is consistent with this thinking, and as a way of looking at life on Earth it has two advantages.

Both involve how we care for this fragile planet we call home. When we borrow things from friends or family, we try hard to return them in the same or better shape. Our relationship with the person we borrow from gets damaged if we damage what we borrowed. It shows a lack of respect for our generous friend if we do not care for the loaned item as if it were ours. That is the first advantage in thinking of the Earth as being on loan from our children – we take good care of the item and harmonious relationships are maintained.

The second advantage of looking at the Earth as on loan from our children is that we look forward in time instead of just being focused on the present. When we look forward in time, we think about how what we do will impact coming generations. Will there be enough resources for my children? Will there be enough clean water and clean air? Will there be the beauty of nature that helps us re-create our weary selves? Seeing the world as a loan from our children helps us work for a better future for the planet and all the living beings on it because we are handing it forward to people we love and care about.

Maybe if we were able to really shift our thinking to this way of looking at our planet, we would not be dealing with global warming or oceans that have become floating garbage dumps or cancer rates that have increased dramatically over the last few decades. Looking at the resources of our world as something on loan might just lead to reduced consumption and the development of more sustainable energy and communities. Maybe, just maybe, it might lead to world peace. We can only imagine, can't we?