

## **“Echoes of the Heart”**

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**The power of the New Year.** The power of the New Year is seen in *the power of tomorrow* which is always symbolic of hope. Tomorrow, anything can happen. Tomorrow, change can come, transformation can take place. As the poet reminds us, *the night cannot forever hold back the dawn.*

Tomorrow is an opportunity for us to make sense out of today ... and yesterday. Sometimes the *yesterdays* of our lives are so overcome with sadness and grief, with disappointment and regret, that the only way we can make sense of things is by what we choose to *do* tomorrow and in the days ahead.

When we find ourselves locked into a long night of darkness, sometimes the best thing we can do is resolve to do good things today. For example, when we give ourselves to a cause—through compassion and generosity of spirit—our efforts can serve to *make things better.*

What we do today and tomorrow can honor our sacred memories of yesterday. Our actions and good deeds can give us an enlivened sense of purpose that builds up hope and gives added meaning to today.

**Acts of kindness and generosity change everything.** In South African Alan Paton’s book, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, a young idealistic South African lawyer, named Arthur Jarvis, is killed by the son of South African pastor, Stephen Kumalo.

As it turns out, Arthur Jarvis has just finished writing a book about the need for justice in his very divided and conflicted native land. Meanwhile, when Pastor Kumalo seeks out Arthur Jarvis’ father to apologize for his son’s violent act, some intriguing events begin to play out.

While Jarvis’ father doesn’t necessarily share his son’s passion for working against the evils of apartheid, in order to make sense of his son’s life, he begins to immerse himself in his son’s book. With a new sense of his son’s commitments, gleaned from the book, the grief-stricken father is able to receive pastor Kumalo in a more kindly manner.

In the ensuing weeks, the elder Jarvis (a man of considerable financial means) embraces a whole new way of dealing with his son’s death—to the point where he commits to help build a new church for pastor Kumalo’s congregation. Beyond that, the distraught father also offers to build a dam for the local village so the people will have year-around access to fresh water.

Thus, through acts of kindness, generosity and sheer *goodness of heart*, Arthur Jarvis’ father is able to honor his son’s memory in a way that has a far-reaching impact.

Immediately, it turns out, the prospect of the construction of a new dam sends shock-waves of hope throughout the impoverished community. Suddenly, all about the village, people are embracing life with a new spirit and a revitalized energy. Everywhere, it seems, hope is in the air.

Soon there will be water for irrigation and they will even be able to raise cattle. And because there will be more than enough food to go around, the young people won't have to rush off to the cities to find work.

The point is, we never know to what extent our acts of goodness and kindness can change lives and transform life-situations. And along the way, they give meaning and purpose to our lives as well.

There's power in tomorrow because *tomorrow* really can make all things new. The things we do and say, the projects and causes we support and commit to; they all make a difference.

**Let the New Year come!** Sometimes yesterday's sadness is an awful burden on our spirit. And while we can't change our past, still, our acts of kindness and generosity *can* transform the present as it opens to the future and they *can* give our lives a new meaning and purpose that matters.

So, let the New Year come! With hope and promise, let it come! Across America and around the world, let the New Year break through! And let us—together—do, whatever it is that we do, in ways that honor the best and the highest to which God calls us.

Happy New Year!